

# Legislative Update

A Publication of the **TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION**  
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## Two Paths to Campus Carry

A new state law based on Senator Birdwell's SB 11, will permit individuals with concealed handgun licenses to bring their weapons into campus buildings. However, universities and community colleges will take slightly different paths.

For one thing, two-year schools have an extra year to plan. Under the statute, public universities must implement campus carry by September 2016 and community colleges must comply by the following September. In a June article, *Amarillo Globe-News'* Jim McBride profiled two Panhandle institutions and their tentative plans for implementing the new law. West Texas A&M officials will be "waiting on some guidance from the A&M system on how they see compliance with this law being done across the system." Amarillo College's vice president of student affairs said "Community colleges like AC will have the benefit of seeing how the law will take shape at public universities before they have to comply."

Community college educators will watch universities' behavior carefully. The two-year colleges' deadline of September 2017 will actually come after another Regular Session, with plenty of opportunities for further alterations, at least hypothetically. However, keep in mind that any such changes can work both ways. Supporters of campus carry were unhappy with institutional exemptions under the law to create gun-free zones and will undoubtedly be working during the interim for broader allowance of firearms on campus. They will be collecting campaign promises during the next election cycle.

The gun-free zones will probably be more applicable to universities. According to numerous reports, the statute's authors did not intend to restrict access for licensed carriers in

classrooms, libraries, or offices—the precise sites of concern to many community college faculty.

Testimony indicated a great deal of interest in restrictions regarding athletic facilities and university hospitals, for instance. Some witnesses stated that these particular sites can be filled with raw emotion. Perhaps they have never been in a classroom when exams are returned to students.

## Lawyers, Guns & Money

by Beaman Floyd, TCCTA Lobbyist



The 84th Legislative Session ended in June after 140 days of law-making, tension, and a fair amount of competitive uncertainty between legislators on a number of levels. Though community colleges continue to be faced with a large number of public policy challenges related to their broad mission, the legislature focused primarily on two issues: guns and money.

SB 11 passed the legislature by a comfortable margin. TCCTA actively worked in favor of local options for community colleges to allow or forbid guns on campus, an option granted to private institutions. This position was presented in committee and written testimony by TCCTA's immediate past president David Lydic and executive director Richard Moore. TCCTA members responded to numerous calls-to-action by sharing their position to representatives and their staff. After much wrangling, SB 11 was passed with the following key provisions:

- Valid concealed handgun licensees will be able to carry concealed weapons on campuses.
- Private institutions will be allowed to "opt out" by adopting broad rules banning weapons on campus, after consultation with faculty, staff, and students.
- Public institutions will be able to limit weapons on campus after consultation with faculty, staff and students, but those limits may not have the effect of banning weapons altogether.

- Open carry is specifically prohibited by the bill.

With regard to funding, the House and the Senate fought over both amounts for community colleges and how to fund. The House championed contact hour funding, but failed to fund the success point structure previously adopted by the legislature. The Senate proposed the exact opposite, funding success points but reducing contact hours funding. Ultimately the House prevailed, resulting in a disappointing overall level of funding and an ambiguous position for success initiatives.

The ambiguities created by the bills affecting both the weapons and success points creates a strong likelihood of interim activity, including the possibility of faculty involvement in working groups on the issues, and the potential for litigation, particularly over rules related to weapons on campus. TCCTA will continue to keep you up to date with developments through the *Messenger*, the *TCCTA Blog*, and special bulletins in the coming months. Like the song says, "send lawyers, guns and money." Stay tuned... ☆

## TRS Remains Strong

Sometimes, no news is good news—especially when it comes to the Legislature.

Such may be the case with the Texas Teacher Retirement System (TRS), which, just a few years ago, was reportedly headed for financial trouble. Thanks to a law, passed in 2013, beefing up the TRS fund with a new revenue stream and various actuarial adjustments, current members of this "defined benefits" plan can breathe a little easier for now.

As reported earlier, conservative advocacy organizations nationwide believe that all public defined benefits pensions should be replaced by "defined contribution" plans (of which Optional Retirement Program is an example). However, the Legislature never seriously considered any such a move during the 2015 Regular Session. This is significant, given the political profile of today's House and Senate.

In fact, the TRS fund is healthy enough to perhaps provide a benefits enhancement at some point in the future, having earned more than \$19 billion during the last fiscal year,

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**TCCTA Conference for  
Faculty Leaders  
September 25-26  
Marriott Hotel South, Austin**

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according to the Texas Retired Teachers Association. The Board is not allowed to increase eligibility or benefits unless the Fund reaches a certain actuarial threshold.

The 2015 Session was somewhat disappointing to current retirees, however—many of whom have not had a cost of living increase in years.

Bills did pass adjusting the calendar of retirement eligibility and other matters, but nothing dramatic. TRS members should receive an update from the agency on these laws this summer.

## State Revenue Stream Declines

For the first time in more than five years, state sales tax revenue in Texas has declined. After 62 consecutive months of growth, in June this vital revenue stream was down 1.4 percent compared to June 2014, according to *Texas Government Insider*.

Texas, with no state income tax, relies heavily upon sales taxes.

Comptroller Glenn Hegar said the decline was due to the slowdown in the oil and gas sector.

If this trend continues, it will eventually affect the prospective amount of revenue available for all state programs, including formula funding for community and technical colleges. Furthermore, some local college districts are highly dependent upon oil and gas for property tax revenue.

Texas policy makers are fond of citing the “Texas Miracle” regarding the state’s robust economy. Certainly Texas is better off than many other states, but the chief miracle may have occurred eons ago with geological formations and seismic activity that produced fossil fuels. Without the oil and gas industry, Texas would be a very different place economically.

Most prognosticators believe the downturn

will be modest compared to previous busts in the oil patch.

## Block Scheduling Bill Enacted

Before adjournment on June 1, the Legislature passed a bill mandating a block scheduling plan for certain workforce development programs at community colleges.

HB 1583 was introduced by Representative Travis Clardy (R-Nacogdoches) with support from the advocacy group Complete College America. The basic idea is to offer courses within a more compressed time frame. Some studies have indicated that student completion rates improve using this model.

An earlier version of the bill generated consternation with some community college educators who were concerned about the practical difficulties and cost of implementing such a plan across the mandated curriculum, plus the potential effect upon contact hour funding, and the task of finding part-time faculty to teach at the times offered.

Importantly, the enacted version allows colleges, under new rules of the Coordinating Board, to petition for an institutional exception to the number of mandated new block programs (set at five by the bill), due to “hardship.” It’s easy to see how smaller colleges, for instance, would encounter problems with implementation. Other schools might already be fulfilling the basic intent of the measure.

Regarding the scope of the new law, here is a key passage from HB 1583:

To facilitate timely degree completion by students at public junior colleges, from among the allied health, nursing, and career and technology associate degree or certificate programs offered by a public junior college, the college shall establish, for at least five of

those programs not previously offered as a block schedule curriculum, a block schedule curriculum under which:

(1) courses required for a student’s enrollment in the program as a full-time student are offered each semester in scheduled blocks, such as a morning, full-day, afternoon, evening, or weekend block schedule, designed to provide scheduling predictability from semester to semester to students enrolled in the program; and

(2) students may enroll in an entire block schedule curriculum offered under the program in a semester, rather than enrolling in individual courses leading toward the degree or certificate.

### Get Connected!

Members are urged to visit the TCCTA website frequently.

The home page contains information on important and timely subjects, both in the Texas Legislature and around the country. As well as developments from the Coordinating Board, and any news regarding Social Security in Congress.

Also make sure to subscribe to the *TCCTA Blog*, which features current events from the Capitol, calls for action by members, headlines on teaching techniques, and news summaries from a host of journalistic and professional sources.

And if you haven’t already done so, make sure to follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram (just search for TCCTA).

[tccta.org](http://tccta.org)



## TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION Membership Enrollment Form

Dr.  
 Mr.  
 Mrs.  
 Miss  
 Ms.

\_\_\_\_\_ *First Name*      \_\_\_\_\_ *Middle Name or Initial*      \_\_\_\_\_ *Last Name*

College \_\_\_\_\_

Home Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_ *(If more than one campus, indicate your campus.)*  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *Street Address or Post Office Box*  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *City*      \_\_\_\_\_ *State*      \_\_\_\_\_ *ZIP Code*

Instructional  
 (Subject taught: \_\_\_\_\_)

Administrative/Library/Media  
 (Position: \_\_\_\_\_)

Classified/Retired/Adjunct  
 (Specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

Unaffiliated/Student  
 (Specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

**E-MAIL (IMPORTANT!):**

Check here to purchase the **Optional Liability Insurance Program**, and add \$55 to the amount of your payment. Members must purchase insurance to receive TCCTA legal assistance. Insurance rate: \$27. State surplus lines tax @ 4.85%: \$1.31; State stamping fee @ 0.06%: \$0.02; Association administrative fee: \$26.67.

### CHECK ONE CATEGORY FOR MEMBERSHIP:

- Professional Member
  - Instructional – Full-Time—Dues \$45
  - Administrative—Dues \$45
  - Retired Professional (With voting privileges)—Dues \$45
- Associate Member
  - Instructional – Part-Time (Adjunct)—Dues \$35
  - Retired Associate (No voting privileges)—Dues \$35
- Classified (Full- or Part-time)—Dues \$35
- Student (Enrolled for graduate credit in community college education)—Dues \$30
- Unaffiliated (Friend of the Association)—Dues \$35

CHECK HERE to receive the *TCCTA Messenger* and subscribe to the TCCTA Blog at no additional charge.

Membership Period: September 1, 2015–August 31, 2016.

ENROLL ONLINE SECURELY at [tccta.org](http://tccta.org).

IF PAYING BY CREDIT CARD USING THIS FORM:  Visa  MasterCard

Name on Credit Card \_\_\_\_\_

Billing Address \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Expires \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ CVV (3 digit code) \_\_\_\_\_ Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**AUTOMATIC RENEWAL:** Check here to authorize TCCTA to bill your credit card directly each year at the annual membership rate.

**IF PAYING BY CHECK:** Give enrollment form and check (payable to TCCTA) to your campus representative or mail to: TCCTA, 5113 Southwest Parkway, Suite 185, Austin, Texas 78735.