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November 11, 2025

Re: Agenda Item No. 4.2

Dear Texas A & M University System Regents;

My name is Amy Reid and I am writing on behalf of PEN America to offer testimony regarding Agenda Item No. 4.2, the two proposed updates to university policies concerning classroom instruction scheduled for review by the Board of Regents on November 12. As a literary and free expression organization, PEN America celebrates literature and defends the freedoms that make it possible, including the freedom to write, read, and learn. PEN America opposes policies that censor ideas in higher education or erode the institutional structures necessary to insulate the classroom from political interference. In support of Texas campus communities, we wish to express our concern that these two changes represent a significant blow to academic freedom for your faculty and, consequently, a profound violation of your students' freedom to learn.

Specifically, the proposed change to policy 08.01, Civil Rights Protections and Compliance, would ban any instruction related to "race or gender ideology, or topics related to sexual orientation or gender identity, unless the course and relevant course materials are approved in advance by the member CEO or designee." This constitutes an extremely broad gag order that would stifle discussions in courses across the curriculum – from anthropology and biology to history and psychology.

The stipulation that a campus CEO would need to grant approval for any exceptions is of little comfort, as this centralizes power over the whole curriculum in the hands of one individual who, in practice, cannot be an expert in all academic fields and who will undoubtedly face extreme scrutiny for their decisions. The likelihood of the campus administration erring on the side of caution to avoid political pressure is extraordinarily high, as is the impetus for self-censorship by faculty.

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This already expansive prohibition is further compounded by a proposed ban on “course content that promotes activism on race and ethnicity.” To avoid running afoul of these broad provisions, would a history professor need to avoid discussing redlining on the chance that a student might be inspired to engage in housing policy? Similarly, would a biology professor require explicit approval to teach on the mating or pairing practices of any species or the gender fluidity of some plants and animals, as that would seem to fall under the prohibited topic of “sexual orientation or gender identity”?

We are also concerned by the implications of the proposed change to policy 12.01, on Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure, which expands on a provision cautioning faculty against introducing “controversial” topics that are not directly related to the course content by requiring that faculty not diverge from “the approved syllabus for the course.”

Such vague and overbroad warnings are likely to deter faculty from allowing open student discussion of potentially controversial ideas, even when directly relevant to the course material. They would also prevent faculty from introducing additional materials during the semester in response to student interest in a topic. Good and effective teaching is not static but responsive, able to seize a ‘teachable moment’ and engage with students’ questions and concerns. This provision would limit both the freedom of faculty to teach and the ability of students to learn and explore ideas freely.

PEN America, as an organization that has promoted literature and freedom of expression around the world for over 100 years, urges the board to reject these proposed policy changes. If adopted, they will not only undermine the ability of Texas A&M faculty to instruct their students, but will chill free expression and discourse in the classroom and across the university. Texas A&M’s [mission](#) to “prepar[e] students for leadership, responsibility and service in a diverse and global society that is experiencing a rapid change in technology” requires that students have access to an education free from censorship. We call on you to protect the freedom to learn of all students in the Texas A&M System.

Respectfully,



Dr. Amy Reid  
Interim Program Manager, Freedom to Learn, PEN America