

# Joint Press Release by Texas AAUP & Texas NAACP

*April 2nd, 2024*

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**04/03/2024**

Texas NAACP & Texas Conference of American Association of University Professors (AAUP)

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## UT AUSTIN STAFF LAID OFF IN NEW SB 17-RELATED DEVELOPMENT

Today, a large number of University of Texas at Austin professionals who formerly worked in DEI assignments received pink slips notifying them that their days at the University will come to an end in 90 days. Estimates are that approximately 60 persons received these pink slips, with some offices to be closed by May 31st. 40 persons who were notified that they would be laid off were with the Division of Campus and Community Engagement (DCCE), formerly the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement.

None of the staff who received pink slips are currently working in DEI-related jobs. In order to comply with SB 17, all of the professionals had been given new responsibilities and some had been moved to new offices. Because of this, we have urgent concerns about these termination notices, which follow closely upon a recent communication to University officials around the State, including University of Texas at Austin officials, from Senator Brandon Creighton, warning them about continuing persons in their employment if the changes amounted to simple label changes. Senator Creighton also plans a meeting in May to assess DEI compliance.

A complete unit in DCCE was eliminated in this action, one originally created in response to the reduction of the Top 10 percent requirement at the University to 6 percent. At that time, the University reported to the Legislature that there was a need to continue to “show students of all backgrounds that going to school here at UT is a possibility.” DCCE houses many initiatives for the campus community, K-12 students, and the Austin community as a whole, including the University Interscholastic League, the UT Elementary School, Disability and Access, and many others. These programs will now be distributed to 9 different campus units. Given that DCCE had

already been modified to comply with SB 17, its dismantling his appears to be an inappropriate and unnecessary response to SB17.

The Texas Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Texas NAACP, and other affiliated organizations will continue to gather information on these precipitous terminations, which we believe to be potential attacks on First Amendment freedoms. At the time when they were issued pink slips, all terminated employees were no longer in DEI-related positions. Therefore, these terminations clearly are intended to retaliate against employees because of their previous association with DEI and speech that they exercised prior to their current assignments. In addition, the way cuts were made in DCCE make it clear that racial and ethnic discrimination was the clear purpose of this action.

We call on University of Texas at Austin officials to be forthcoming about these terminations, their impact on University services to students and the community, and the provisions made to displaced staff, who until today had been assured that their positions were not in jeopardy.



# NAAACP

*Texas*

STATE CONFERENCE

## References

Lily Kepner, “[Sources: UT lays off at least 60 employees previously in DEI-related position, closes DCCE](#)“, *Austin American-Statesman*, April 2, 2024.

[Senator Brandon Creighton](#), “[Senator Brandon Creighton Announces Oversight on Senate Bill 17 Implementation](#)“, March 26, 2024.

Victoria May, “[Texas’ Top 10% Rule makes little difference in diversity on campus, study says](#)“, *The Daily Texan*, July 30, 2019. Article relates to the UT Austin Division of Diversity and Community Engagement and its function.



The University of Texas at Austin  
Office of the President

Dear UT community,

Soon after the passage last year of Senate Bill 17 — which prohibits many activities around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) — the University embarked on a multiphase process to review campus portfolios and end or redesign the policies, programs, trainings, and roles affected by the new law. Our initial focus was to ensure we made the required changes by SB 17's January 1 effective date, but we knew that more work would be required to utilize our talent and resources most effectively in support of our teaching and research missions, and ultimately, our students.

Since that date, we have been evaluating our post-SB 17 portfolio of divisions, programs, and positions. The new law has changed the scope of some programs on campus, making them broader and creating duplication with long-standing existing programs supporting students, faculty, and staff. Following those reviews, we have concluded that additional measures are necessary to reduce overlap, streamline student-facing portfolios, and optimize and redirect resources into our fundamental activities of teaching and research.

For these reasons, we are discontinuing programs and activities within the Division of Campus and Community Engagement (DCCE) that now overlap with our efforts elsewhere. Following these changes, the scale and needs of the remaining DCCE activities do not justify a stand-alone division. As a result, we are closing DCCE and redistributing the remaining programs. This means that we will continue to operate many programs with rich histories spanning decades, such as disability services, University Interscholastic League, the UT charter schools, and volunteer and community programs. Going forward, these programs will be part of other divisions where they complement existing operations. We know these programs and the dedicated staff who run them will continue to have positive impacts on our campus and community.

Additionally, funding used to support DEI across campus prior to SB 17's effective date will be redeployed to support teaching and research. As part of this reallocation, associate or assistant deans who were formerly focused on DEI will return to their full-

time faculty positions. The positions that provided support for those associate and assistant deans and a small number of staff roles across campus that were formerly focused on DEI will no longer be funded.

I recognize that strong feelings have surrounded SB 17 from the beginning and will shape many Longhorns' perceptions of these measures. It is important that we respect the perspectives and experiences of our fellow Longhorns as the changes we are announcing today take effect. It is also important that this continues to be a welcoming, supportive community for all.

Respect for our students, faculty, and staff will be essential as we make these changes. The Division of Student Affairs will work to ensure that current student-facing services will continue to be available for the rest of this semester, and student workers also will retain their positions through the end of this term. Staff members whose positions are being eliminated will have the opportunity to apply and be considered for existing open positions at the University, and resources will be made available to support them.

UT Austin is a world-class public research university serving all of Texas and more than 50,000 incredible students. Our students, alumni, faculty, and staff continue to affect the world in meaningful ways each day. Other campus leaders and I appreciate your ongoing efforts as we seek to maximize the impact of our teaching and research.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jay Hartzell". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

Jay Hartzell  
President