Looking Ahead

The TFA Directors have focused our attention on planning and decision-making to identify priorities as we strive to provide the best possible advocacy for members. We continue to meet often and flexibly, focusing on how to connect with each other and the membership during this pandemic. Our membership numbers are growing. We are reaching out across the state to offer support as faculty members try to navigate formidable challenges. Early in 2021, TFA will send mass email membership invitations to faculty at most of our state and some private institutions.

Members report varied concerns. Some universities urged their students to quarantine for two weeks before going home for the Thanksgiving holiday, while others did not address the issue or merely asserted that student behavior cannot be controlled. Some members expressed significant concern for contingent faculty. TFA is moving forward to take a stand for these often overworked and unprotected faculty. Some university administrators have removed spring break from their academic calendars to reduce student and faculty travel during the semester. Some members report they have been included in decisions regarding methods of teaching in the coming semester while others have had no voice. Some members fear administrators will make budget cuts which will impact potential promotions or even their jobs.

As the fall semester winds down, college and university administrators have to make crucial decisions regarding graduation ceremonies. TFA called on Governor Abbott to instruct the governing boards to postpone ceremonies or at least to hold them virtually. Current news reports assert that Texas now leads the country in positive COVID-19 outbreaks. Texas Monthly points out that “Eighty-three colleges and universities in Texas have recorded more than 20,000 coronavirus cases, by far the most in the nation.” Although some colleges and universities still plan to hold in-person ceremonies, many have decided to limit guest attendance, to spread ceremonies out over several days to reduce crowd size, and to reduce or eliminate required faculty attendance. Some universities held graduation ceremonies before Thanksgiving.

Regardless of one's position on the election outcome, our organization has too much work to do to let differences stop us from working together to solve problems. With a new president and administration taking office in January, educators will have a new Secretary of Education. We can anticipate renewed focus and unyielding support for educators dealing with unprecedented obstacles in and out of the classroom. In addition, the new first lady will be grading papers in the White House as she continues to work in higher education. I have participated in several virtual conferences with Dr. Biden, and she has promised to bring attention to our concerns.

Board members will soon make choices regarding how to conduct the annual TFA House of Delegates. These decisions will guide actions now in preparation; balancing the competing desire for in-person contact with health and safety. We will pursue innovation, flexibility, and creative thinking. We will move forward to find new ways to address our current reality.

The Board is working on the next newsletter which will be distributed in February. In the meantime, we wish Happy Holidays to all. Please stay safe and well.

Pat Heintzelman, Lamar University