



August 27, 2025

Dear Senators,

I am pleased to welcome those of you who are joining us for the first time to the Senate, and welcome back those of you who were with us last year. I look forward to working with each of you during what will no doubt be an interesting and consequential year. Below please find a summary of notable developments since the end of the spring semester.

1. The Future of LSU

This is clearly a time of profound uncertainty in the landscape of higher education. The United States has for decades led the world in scholarship and innovation, buoyed in large part by tremendous public support for and investment in our colleges and universities. However, maintaining this position requires an ongoing commitment to the policies and conditions which fostered its emergence, and poor choices or retrenchment in support can lead to decline from which the institutions may never fully recover. The question we face at this moment is which path lies before us? Answering this question requires us to consider three factors which have contributed to the ascension of American academia: its purpose, policies, and people.

Purpose: While recently there has been increased focus on the economic value of a college degree, the benefits of higher education encompass more than lifetime earnings. Princeton describes a liberal arts education as one which “challenges you to consider not only how to solve problems but also trains you to ask which problems to solve and why, preparing you for positions of leadership and a life of service to the nation and all of humanity.”¹ These critical thinking skills are highly versatile. For example, they enable individuals to meaningfully participate in civic life while also holding value in the workplace, particularly with the expanding reach of artificial intelligence.

That is what we provide at LSU, and as we move forward, we must maintain our focus on addressing the full spectrum of our students’ needs and the benefits of a comprehensive education.

Policies: Education is also a critical element of democracy. As analysts at Brookings note, “Higher education plays a critical role in fostering intellectual humility, critical inquiry, and social responsibility – all of which are necessary for informed democracy actors.”² In many ways democracy and higher education require the same type of policies to function and support one another. Political scientists Daniel Ziblatt and Steven Levitsky argue that effective democracies require two critical norms: institutional forbearance and mutual toleration. Institutional forbearance in the democratic arena means that politicians and political institutions refrain from taking actions

¹ “What Does Liberal Arts Mean?”, Princeton University, accessed August 25, 2025.

<https://admission.princeton.edu/academics/what-does-liberal-arts-mean>.

² Renée Rippberger, Rachel Beatty Riedl, and Jonathan Katz, “Targeting higher education is an essential tool in the autocratic playbook,” Brookings, May 1, 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/targeting-higher-education-is-an-essential-tool-in-the-autocratic-playbook/>.

which, while they may be legal, could be damaging to the democratic system.³ Mutual toleration is described as a situation wherein “we may disagree with, and even strongly dislike, our rivals, but we nevertheless accept them as legitimate” (102).

The effective functioning of universities requires similar norms. Just as the ability to engage in democratic discourse requires the government to refrain from punishing individuals for speech it does not like, supporting the principle of academic freedom means that authorities, including those within the university, must practice institutional forbearance and refrain from punishing faculty and students whose research or teaching they find objectionable. An example of the dire consequences that can result when this norm breaks down and the corrosive effects of power are applied to academics can be seen in the turmoil in US higher education in the late 1940s and ‘50s.

A way to solidify institutional forbearance is to formalize autonomy for higher education institutions, allowing them to self-govern. Indeed, recognition of the need to insulate institutions of higher education from outside control goes back centuries. For example, David Rabban, a scholar of academic freedom and the First Amendment, writes that the 1819 Supreme Court case *Trustees of Dartmouth College v. Woodward* established that “higher education serves the vital social function of diffusing knowledge, which is essential to the effective operation of American society. And...that external interference can jeopardize the ability of universities to perform this central institutional function.”⁴ While this is important in structuring the relationship between universities and external bodies, it is similarly important that shared governance between faculty and administration exist within the university and both groups exercise similar restraint.

Mutual toleration is a complement to institutional forbearance. Free inquiry within colleges and universities demands a mutual tolerance between competing perspectives, one in which disputes are settled through evidence and argumentation and not the application of institutional power to silence your ideological opponents and stifle debate.

Maintenance of both these norms, and the policies and practices which sustain them, are critical in allowing us to pursue our institutional mission. They must be constantly monitored and defended when necessary.

People: Another critical element in the success of American higher education has been its people, particularly the incredible talent it has attracted from both home and abroad. In many ways we have embodied Reagan’s belief in an America where “any person with the courage, with the desire to tear up their roots, to strive for freedom, to attempt and dare to live in a strange and foreign place, was welcome here.”⁵ We developed the leading system of higher education by creating an environment which attracted the best researchers from around the world and supported them in their work. Moving away from these practices would only hurt ourselves as well as our international standing; you can’t be a global leader if you refuse to engage the world.

Regrettably, I have heard from many friends and colleagues over the last few months, including some at LSU, who wonder what their future in US higher education may be. I understand their

³ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*. (Penguin Books, 2019).

⁴ David M. Rabban, *Academic Freedom: From Professional Norm to First Amendment Right* (Harvard University Press, 2024), 42.

⁵ Annelise Anderson, “Ronald Reagan and American Exceptionalism,” in *American Exceptionalism in a New Era: Rebuilding the Foundation of Freedom and Prosperity*, ed. T.W. Gilligan (Hoover Institution Press, 2018), 144.

concern and let me be clear in my response: you are at LSU because you deserve to be here, we value you, and we are a better institution because you are with us.

Returning to the original question, what is the path forward for LSU? In many ways the last few years have been a story of tremendous success. We are educating more students than ever, have exhibited consistent year-over-year growth in our research expenditures and output, and are creating economic value for our state which far exceeds the support we receive in public funding. I am optimistic that with leadership that prioritizes the academic mission of the university and demonstrates a commitment to maintaining the conditions necessary for success we will emerge from this challenging moment in an even better position than we are now. As the flagship land-grant institution we owe that to our students and the people of Louisiana.

2. Teaching Resources

As you may recall from reports in the spring, the Faculty Senate was asked by the President's office to undertake an effort to identify and disseminate pedagogical best practices across campus as part of the university-wide effort to increase student success. I am pleased to announce that the Student Success Initiative Committee created by the Faculty Senate Executive Committee for this purpose has now published a website including resources on teaching best practices, professional development opportunities for faculty, and a series of FAQs about teaching on the Learning and Teaching Collaborative website, available at <https://www.lsu.edu/academicaffairs/ltc/resources/student-success.php>.

My thanks to committee members Vice Provost Jacqueline Bach; Jennifer Baumgartner and Rebecca Burdette from Communication Across the Curriculum; Alexandra Garcia, Center for Academic Success; Will Monroe, Learning and Teaching Collaborative; Tara Rose, Office of Institutional Effectiveness; Param Singh, VP of the Faculty Senate; and the staff in the Office of Academic Affairs for all of their efforts in developing these materials and creating the site. Please let us know if you have any additional questions or recommendations as we will continue our efforts to further develop these types of resources for our campus community and will have further updates as the project progresses.

3. Faculty Raises

In June Interim President Lee announced that a 3% merit raise pool was being provided for faculty and staff, noting that this was the fifth year in a row with this type of increase. It is worth noting that this pool was created using self-generated funds and not funds appropriated by the legislature, and as such reflects a strong commitment on the part of the administration to prioritize the faculty and staff and a willingness to make hard decisions about other areas of the budget. My thanks to Interim President Lee, Interim Executive Vice President & Provost Blanchard, and the other members of the administration involved in this challenging but appreciated process.

4. Recording Student Attendance or Participation

Faculty who are teaching this semester should have received an email from the Office of Academic Affairs on Monday, August 18 discussing internal and federal requirements to verify student attendance or participation in courses. This must be done once for each student enrolled in your courses, with the final report to be submitted via the Teaching Dashboard application in Workday

by Friday, September 12 for courses offered on the A&M campus. Courses offered through other campuses, including Law Center and Vet School, have other deadlines. Please refer to that message for these deadlines, additional information on acceptable forms of verification, and useful instructions on how to record this information in Workday.

5. Presidential Search Committee

The search committee for the next LSU President had its first meeting last Tuesday, August 19th, and we have at least four more meetings planned on September 10, October 1, October 29, and November 12. If you have any recommendations for candidates the search firm should contact you can either let me know directly or send an email to lsupresidentialsearch@consultssa.com.

6. Starting the New Senate Year

With the beginning of a new academic year there are some business items which will come up in the next few weeks. At our next meeting we will hold elections for the third member-at-large of the Executive Committee. By rule this seat is reserved for a Senator in the first year of their term though, due to the restriction limiting FSEC membership to no more than two voting members from any one unit, Senators from the College of Science are ineligible to run. We are also taking steps to organize our New Senator and Committee Chair orientations, so if you are a member of either of these two groups please keep an eye out for a message inquiring about your availability.

Thank you for being here to serve your colleagues and students. I appreciate your willingness to take on these responsibilities and the other members of the FSEC and I are here to assist in any way we can. Please let us know about any issues, concerns or questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Daniel C. Tirone
President, LSU Faculty Senate