



September 16, 2025

Dear Senators,

I begin today's report by recognizing the pain that many in our country are feeling as the result of the devastating violence we have observed over the past weeks, months and years, including acts which were politically motivated. There is no justification for these attacks and we cannot condemn forcefully enough the events in Utah, Colorado, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Texas, New York, California, and Washington, D.C., just to name a few. Stopping these threats should be a societal imperative, one which is political but not partisan; each of us, whether Democrat, Republican, or other, have been affected and we share a profound collective interest in preventing future occurrences.

Ending the violence will require addressing the inflammatory rhetoric being used in our public conversations. Scholars such as Hannah Arendt have established the strong relationship between violent and dehumanizing language and the rise of violence: when we describe individuals with whom we disagree as being unworthy of respect, declare they have fewer rights than those who share our beliefs, or categorize them as the enemy because their positions are different from our own, we are creating conditions which facilitate violent acts which lead to their own cycles of retaliation and increasing hostilities. In a free society we must refrain from this type of language and instead resolve our differences through processes grounded in respect, including respect for each other, the rule of law, and the institutions we have established to create and maintain order.

Education is in many ways at the forefront of this challenge. Not only have we seen physical attacks at schools of all levels, but the learning process requires the ability to challenge individuals intellectually, debate strongly held beliefs, and resolve differences through argumentation rather than violence. Critically, we must respect the rights of others to hold beliefs which are different than our own and recognize that they have an equal right to participate in the intellectual life of the university. This does not mean that we must give all positions equal weight; some will, through better evidence or superior argumentation, be more persuasive than others, and it is up to the experts in any given field to collectively determine which theories are credible and which are not. However, this process itself requires freedom in both speech and academic inquiry.

Pursuing truth in this manner requires the freedom to investigate and speak freely, and we are fortunate that at LSU we generally have strong policies protecting both of these critical areas. While our adherence to them has been imperfect on occasion, they have generally made us one of the freest institutions in the state to collectively investigate challenging ideas, pursue truth, and educate successive generations of students. In short, there is no free speech crisis at our university.

Maintaining this freedom requires accepting that you cannot achieve free speech on campus by compelling students or faculty to say some things or refrain from saying others. Freedom of speech comes not from increasingly restrictive rules but rather from limited constraints which create space

to engage in debate and allow for the participation of each of the groups which constitute our campus community. As professors we must continue to show our students that we value them and appreciate that they have chosen to come to LSU to work with our outstanding faculty by creating environments conducive to their intellectual growth. Similarly, students and others must respect that faculty are not the enemy, but we are instead experts who have dedicated our professional lives to mastering our academic areas. It must also be understood that to serve our students effectively we must have the right to use our best judgement to determine what material is necessary for them to master in order to understand their area of study, and to present that material in a manner consistent with discipline-specific and general professional standards.

It is also important to note that understanding does not require acceptance. Students are free to disagree with the material presented to them so long as they can demonstrate that they understand the argument or evidence with which they disagree. This can often result in challenging the professor or others in a constructive way, and every faculty member should accept and even encourage these types of engagements. What it cannot lead to, however, are efforts to limit the ability to teach certain subjects based on personal objections. Individuals do not have the right to place prohibitions on content which is appropriate for the field of study but which they find personally objectionable. If that ceases to be the case, and the appropriateness of particular content is determined by social preferences rather than intellectual competition between experts within the field, then the purpose of education will simply become to reinforce the beliefs of those who already hold them and the conversion of those who do not rather than a process of seeking truth and improving human welfare.

Our universities have been some of the most important institutions in the growth of our society, and as our political environment becomes increasingly untenable we can also play an important role in de-escalating the violence currently plaguing our country. One of the ways we can do so is by modeling the type of environment which facilitates the constructive dialogue necessary to end the escalatory rhetoric and recriminations. If we cannot have the spirited debates which are necessary to resolve societal differences within the institutions of democracy, then we will inevitably fight outside of them in a way which tears it apart.

The Presidential Search

The Presidential Search Committee will hold its next meeting on Wednesday, October 1. As one of two faculty representatives on the committee I wanted to share my approach to the search and what I will be prioritizing as I review the applications. I have not yet seen any submissions so these comments are offered as general feedback and do not speak to the qualifications of any individual candidates.

From my perspective the most important criterion I will be using to evaluate candidates is their level of academic achievement across the critical areas of research and teaching. While the Provost serves as the chief academic officer for the university, the President – who in this case also serves as the Chancellor of LSU A&M – has a critical role in core processes such as tenure, promotion, and the termination of faculty. For example, the President has final approval authority over the granting of tenure in [PS-36T](#) and the revocation of tenure and termination of a faculty member in [PS-104](#). The President also directs the academic leadership of the system, including the Executive Vice President and Provost and the Chancellors.

I personally believe that to successfully perform the duties of this position a candidate must have deep, firsthand understanding of the academic mission of the university so they can properly lead the faculty under his or her supervision. The Board of Supervisors' [Bylaws](#) also emphasize this aspect of the position by establishing that the President is a member of all faculties within the system and is the chair of each of the Faculty Councils.

The importance of this type of experience is magnified by the fact that there are few other positions at this level of university administration which require this background. Unlike at some public systems in other states, there is no requirement that any member of our system or state higher education boards be a faculty member. Furthermore, the majority of the 14 Executive Vice President or Vice President positions listed on the [LSU organizational chart](#) do not deal directly with teaching or research on campus. Therefore, since the President serves as the chief executive officer of the university and is the the connection between the Board and system-level administration, in my judgement academic experience is a critical component of the candidate's profile so they have a full and complete understanding of the work that we do and the conditions which are required to allow us to be successful.

Of course, success as a researcher and teacher, while important, are not the only qualifications required for the position. I will also look at the candidates' performance in prior administrative roles, their demonstrated leadership capabilities, references from those who know them best and my own interactions with them to inform my opinion. I will also seek to incorporate feedback I receive from you as I decide who to recommend be put forward for the Board's final consideration. Overall, I am confident that the other members of the committee and I understand the gravity of this task and share a common objective of finding the most qualified individual to be the next President of LSU.

Having pointed out many reasons for concern, I'd like to conclude by acknowledging some of the reasons to be positive about our university: our enrollments continue to grow, we're providing our students with the knowledge and skills they need for long-term success, and we continue to do outstanding research in record volume. Additionally, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education ([FIRE](#)) [recently moved LSU into the top 50](#) of its [College Free Speech Rankings](#), the highest score in Louisiana. While we still have work to do there is strong leadership in place, beginning with President Lee and throughout each level of the institution, that is committed to supporting our staff, students and faculty. With this solid foundation we are well-positioned to continue our pursuit of academic excellence now and into the future.

Sincerely,



Daniel C. Tirone
President, LSU Faculty Senate