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NATIONAL

Drag ban sparks free speech debate



Photos courtesy of LGBTQ+ Program records at UTA Special Collections and Shornhorn files / Photo illustration by Ronaldo Bolaños, Samarie Goffney and Christine Vo

The conversation that starts with banning drag performers on campus may be a little part of a much bigger picture

BY DANG LE
The Shornhorn staff

The debate over what constitutes free speech and expression at public universities is being tested in new ways this spring as directives at the federal level continue to evolve.

On March 27, three days after a federal judge temporarily blocked Texas A&M University System's Board of Regents from enforcing a ban on drag shows, the annual Draggieland went on at the flagship university in College Station.

The event, hosted independently by the student organization

Queer Empowerment Council, was the subject of a First Amendment fight between students and university administrators over the past month.

The Queer Empowerment Council, which fully funded this year's Draggieland, argued that the show, and drag shows in general, are expressive conduct. The regents responded that it was unclear whether drag shows are expressive conduct.

Statewide, public universities and their students have been battling over freedom of expression in campus facilities. Free speech,

which has been perceived as a central value of college campuses, is now a part of a growing crack-down on political expression in ways that could potentially circumvent the U.S. Constitution.

"Texas is a hotbed for these kinds of cases right now because there are federal judges in the state who are very open to these new arguments that have not worked for a century," said Chip Stewart, an attorney and professor focused on media law and the First Amendment at Texas Christian University.

In the Foundation for Individual

Rights and Expression's 2025 College Free Speech Rankings, which drew over 58,000 student responses across more than 250 colleges and universities nationwide, only one Texas university made the top 50: UT El Paso. Texas A&M University is ranked at 130, UTA is at 143 and UT Austin is at 244.

University of North Texas, which directed presidents of each university on March 28 to pause any drag performances on campus or any state-funded facilities, is at 205.

DRAG continues on page 2

ARLINGTON

ACTIV center opens

The 73,000-square-foot recreation center held its grand opening March 26.

BY DANG LE
The Shornhorn staff

For two decades, Arlington resident Susan Eaves fought for her city to open a center for seniors. Years working in parks and recreation fueled her passion to get the project going, even if that meant fighting local politicians.

On March 26, with her dream deferred then finally realized, Eaves and hundreds of older Arlington residents stepped foot in ACTIV, the city's new 73,000-square-foot recreation center for adults aged 50 and above located on West Green Oaks Boulevard, for its grand opening.

"It took so long, and we really didn't think we'd ever see it happen," she said.

\$64 million

to construct ACTIV

73,000

square foot recreation center

A lot has happened in the seven years since residents approved the \$45 million bond package to fund the project. The site selection. The design process. The global pandemic.

While the center, officially costing about \$64 million, was scaled back on the exteriors due to budget constraints, it offers a full-court gymnasium, a walking track and a fitness area as promised in the bond. Construction began in 2023.

ACTIV continues on page 3

WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL

Mavs movin' on past



Photo courtesy of Craig Pessman

Élodie Tessier, Lady Movin' Mavs player, right, keeps her eyes on the ball during the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Tournament on March 28 at State Farm Center in Champaign, Illinois.

MOVIN' MAVS continues on page 8

AROUND TOWN

Market unites community

Downtown Arlington Farmers Market will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Saturday through November.

BY JAMES WARD
The Shornhorn staff

At the corner of Front and Center streets Saturday, booths filled with fresh produce and handmade goods were sold at downtown Arlington's first farmers market since 2015.

Opening at 10 a.m., droves of people came and scouted offerings from the 46 vendors lined along the space. From crafts to candles and jams to jewelry, the new Downtown Arlington Farmers Market has it all.

A decade after the old

farmers market closed, residents once again have the opportunity to shop for local goods and produce downtown. The market is open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Saturday until November.

Four Seasons Markets operates the Downtown Arlington Farmers Market along with other cities. Market director Abby Rudolph said over half of the vendors operating at the market are Arlington residents.

Crafts by Cathe offered rows of homemade wooden signs, fabric banners and crocheted items.

Owners Cathe and Ron Krauss have hosted indoor craft shows for years but decided to



The Shornhorn: Samarie Goffney

Liz Torres-Kendall of Genny Bellas manages her stand during the Downtown Arlington Farmers Market on March 29 at the corner of Front and Center streets. Torres-Kendall sold pins, charms and cloth patches.

have their first outdoor show at the Downtown Arlington Farmers Market, their city of residence. Cathe Krauss said

they were thrilled to be a part of the market.

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Drag

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In her March 24 ruling in the Texas A&M System, Judge Lee H. Rosenthal of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas said the Queer Empowerment Council was likely to succeed in demonstrating how A&M's ban violates the First Amendment. The court held that drag is a theatrical expression protected by the First Amendment.

“Sanctioning a student group for sponsoring an event and precluding a student group from holding an event on campus based on the event's content and viewpoint have the same result: stifling expression because it is offensive to some,” Rosenthal wrote.

A few weeks after the Texas A&M regents' decision that was appealed in court, the University of Texas System announced March 18 that its universities are banned from sponsoring drag shows or hosting them in campus facilities.

The UT System consists of 14 institutions, including UTA and UT Dallas, serving more than 256,000 students.

The UT System's move to ban drag shows is “to comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws and executive orders, including any restrictions on the use of public funds,” said Kevin Eltife, Board of Regents chairman, in a statement.

“If the Board of Regents needs to take further action to make this clear, we will do so,” Eltife said.

While the UT System did not define what it considered a prohibited drag show, the Texas A&M regents cited five criteria in the adopted resolution that has since been challenged in court.

- It involves men dressed in women's clothing
- The performers wear makeup and/or prosthetics “meant to parody the female body type”
- The event is open to the public
- It involves “sexualized, vulgar or lewd conduct”
- It involves “conduct that de-means women”

The UT System's announcement came a few days after Tarrant County Judge Tim O'Hare urged the Board of Regents to follow the Texas A&M regents' footsteps.



File photo / Mabel Cruz

Drag queen Deja Dubois, right, speaks with Grace Hennessy, Social Work Council secretary, during the Queer, Sex and Power: A Date with Joy, Positivity, and Empowerment event Feb. 12 in School of Social Work and Smart Hospital building.

O'Hare, a UT Austin alumnus, wrote in a letter to Eltife that UTA hosted an event in February that prominently featured a drag performer and urged the Board of Regents to pass a resolution banning drag shows on UT System campuses. It's unclear what specific event he was referring to.

“Drag shows highlight men reducing the perception of women to stereotypes and body parts,” O'Hare wrote. “I would be encouraged to see the UT System focus on fostering environments of learning and not use resources to prop up sexually-oriented events.”

In February, the UTA's Queer Social Work Association hosted its Queer, Sex and Power event in the School of Social Work and Smart Hospital building. The event featured a drag queen who is a UTA alum.

The event was not funded using university money, said Elwim Sorto, co-founder and CEO of The Queer Social Work Association.

Sorto said the event title drove the decision to have a drag queen on campus.

“The power comes from celebrating and welcoming our culture in school because that's where it be-

longs,” he said. “We're a university at the end of the day. What we want is to create more innovation in the world.”

“While people may think, 'Oh, this is only about trans people' or 'Oh, this is only about drag performers,' it's a little part of a much bigger picture.”

Chip Stewart
attorney and Texas Christian University professor focused on media law and the First Amendment

UTA officials declined to comment for the story.

For at least half a century, drag performance, dressing up, singing or dancing to music are all forms of expressive conduct that have been protected under the First Amendment, Stewart said.

He pointed to the 1969 Tinker v. Des Moines ruling as the bar for free speech in public schools. In December 1965, Mary Beth Tinker, 13, and a group of students wore black armbands to school to protest the war

in Vietnam. The students filed a First Amendment lawsuit when told that they could not return to school until they removed their armbands.

The court ruled 7-2 in favor of the students. The ruling protects student speech that doesn't substantially disrupt the educational vision of the public school, Stewart said.

“The government says, ‘We don't like this viewpoint, and therefore we want to ban it or limit it.’ Generally, courts don't like that,” he said. “They say, ‘The First Amendment should tolerate speech we don't like.’ This favored speech should not be limited by the government. That gives the government too much power to silence dissenting speech, speech they don't like.”

In 2024, after a decade of hosting annual drag shows in the University Center sponsored by campus departments using university funds, UTA students weren't able to organize one of a similar scale following Texas Senate Bill 17 becoming law, which prohibited funding activities regarding diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.

Former organizers of the annual campus drag shows told The Short-horn that the events were free, and

profits went toward scholarships for students. A local organization later hosted a drag show less than a mile from campus.

At the end of the day, a judge should know that “we all have the self pursuit of happiness,” whether they agree with it or not, Sorto said.

In the Texas A&M regents' arguments against campus drag shows, they said that they were complying with a recent executive order issued by President Donald Trump and supported by Gov. Greg Abbott. The regents' decision was defended by the Texas Attorney General's Office.

Trump signed an executive order in January directing federal agencies to ensure that funds are not used to promote gender ideology. A few days later, Abbott signaled his support for Trump's executive order and directed state agencies to reject efforts to “distort commonsense notions of biological sex.”

Rosenthal wrote in her ruling that Draggieland was a ticketed event, and only those who wanted to attend had to do so.

“Anyone who finds the performance or performers offensive has a simple remedy: don't go,” she wrote.

First Amendment advocates typically argue that campuses are generally places where different expressions and viewpoints are tolerated, Stewart said, and colleges that want to ban drag shows have historically allowed conservative speech on campus.

He said he doesn't see banning drag queens as the only way Texas universities, particularly UT Austin, have been aggressively attempting to silence political speech that would typically be protected in different states. It has also been applied to pro-Palestinian protests.

“This is Governor Abbott and the University of Texas and Texas A&M System presidents and boards really trying to establish that they are in control of what is allowable speech, what is not allowable speech on their campuses,” Stewart said.

“While people may think, ‘Oh, this is only about trans people’ or ‘Oh, this is only about drag performers,’ it's a little part of a much bigger picture.”

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G.I.'s mail drop

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SUDOKU

To solve the Sudoku puzzle, each row, column and box must contain the numbers 1 to 9.

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STAY IN TOUCH!

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The Shorlthorn: Samarie Goffney

ACTIV is a 73,000-square-foot recreation center for adults aged 50 and above. It is located on West Green Oaks Boulevard.



The Shorlthorn: Mabel Cruz

Arlington resident April Poitras plays ping pong during the opening ceremony of the ACTIV recreation center March 26 in Arlington. The center offers a variety of fitness classes.

ACTIV

continued from page 1

The center added several amenities not included in its original proposal, including a community garden space, a greenhouse for native plants and six outdoor pickleball courts that James Orloski, Arlington Parks and Recreation director, is sure residents will be “chomping at the bit to get into.”

“It’s what’s inside this building that counts and what’s inside the heart of every single senior that will use this building and connect with somebody else — that’s what’s important,” said Andrew Piel, District 4 city council member.

Piel, a construction law attorney, said the COVID-19 pandemic increased construction prices by about 47%. The city had no use for ACTIV’s land plot in west Arlington, which laid fallow for 40 years, he said. The area has more older residents compared to the east and is accessible to people from anywhere in town.

ACTIV is the third recreation center Arlington has opened in the

past five years, preceded by The Beacon Recreation Center in southeast Arlington and the East Library and Recreation Center in east Arlington in 2020.

Arlington’s other recreational centers are multigenerational and serve people of all ages, but ACTIV is the only place in the city’s system designated for older residents, Orloski said. Outside the active area, residents can socialize through a lounge with billiards and an arts and crafts room.

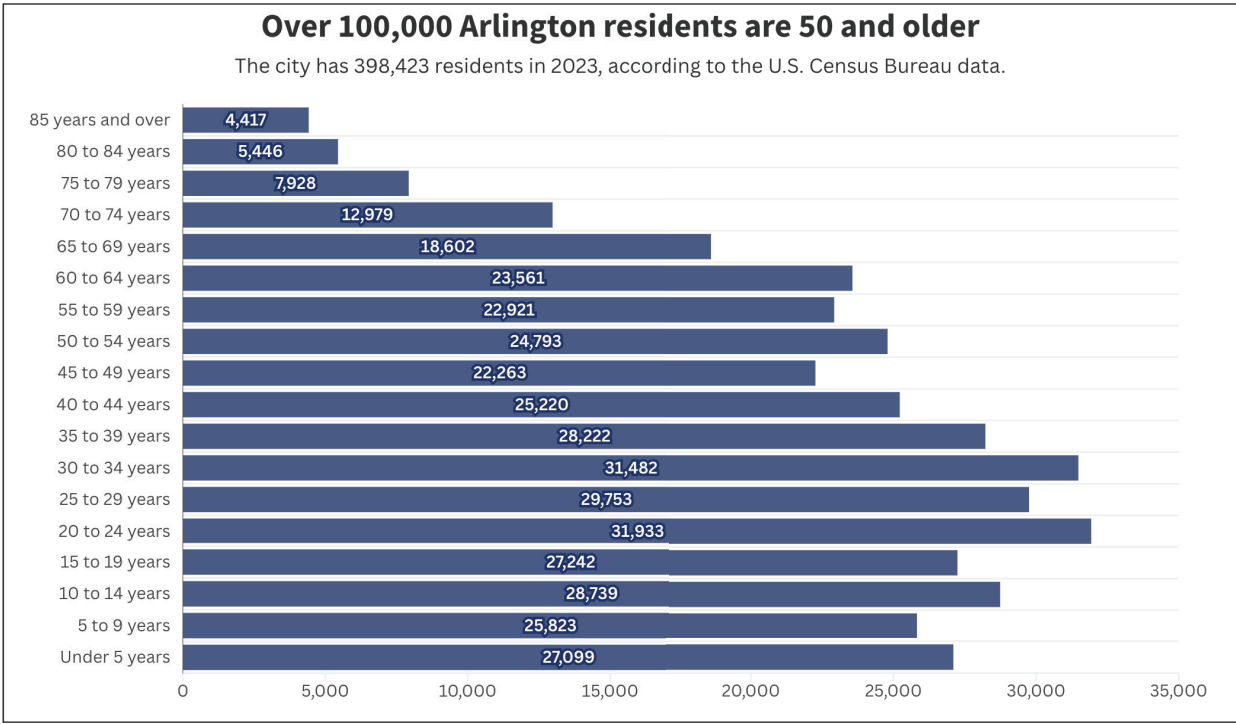
The facility’s natatorium, which includes an indoor lap pool and an indoor hydrotherapy pool, will open later this summer, he said.

Piel said the city committed to this facility because the seniors in Arlington have volunteered hours to the community, have watched their grandchildren for their children and have helped the less fortunate at the charity organization Mission Arlington.

“The seniors of Arlington are a precious resource,” he said.

Over 100,000 Arlington residents are 50 and older, according to 2023 U.S. Census Bureau data.

Mayor Jim Ross said Arlington’s



The Shorlthorn: Dang Le

senior base increases every year. The city factored accessibility into its design to ensure all seniors are accommodated. The facility was designed by Parkhill and managed by the Manhattan Construction Group.

“This is truly a project of love,” Ross said.

Nearly 25% of adults 65 and older are considered socially isolated, according to a National Library of Medicine study. This puts them at risk for health problems, including heart disease, strokes and dementia.

“Our senior citizens in America have a disproportionate burden of not being able sometimes to get out and find a place to nurture the friendships and bonds and love that’s necessary for the later years of your life to be rich and enjoyable and special,” Piel said. “That’s why we’re committed to this facility.”

Even city council members have a mom in their ears.

“Mom said, ‘Son, if you get on city council, there’s one thing you have to

do. You need to make sure that senior center gets built,” Piel said.

City officials said Arlington looked at recreational facilities statewide and around the Dallas-Fort Worth area, such as The REC of Grapevine and The Summit in Grand Prairie, taking good ideas from each of them and incorporating them into ACTIV.

ACTIV’s annual operational cost is about \$700,000, Piel said.

To help fund operating costs, Arlington recreation centers charge for membership fees and daily passes. ACTIV provides different tier plans depending on age and amenity, and members can use any of the city’s recreation centers.

Depending on certain insurance programs, adults can designate Arlington Parks and Recreation as their recreational facility and receive a free membership, Orloski said.

“Standing here today, it’s kind of a testament to how much demand there is, and we’re excited about that,” he said. “The building will sell itself,

truly, as people get in here and see everything that it has to offer.”

Eaves, after 20 years fighting for the facility, was pleased with the space. She had previously found friends and new connections at The Summit, and she knows it will happen at ACTIV, too.

“Life is not over when you retire or something like that, and when you have to move in with your kids or something,” she said.

An older citizen sums up the facility’s attraction.

Arlington resident Cynthia Ashley is looking to sign up for water aerobics, working out with weights and art classes. She’s still navigating through class offerings, but she’s excited about the center.

“It does feel like the first day of a new beginning, new school,” Ashley said.

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A weekly comic illustrating Arlington life by The Shorlthorn design desk.



Ok! Let's get started

"When it's due at 11:59pm"

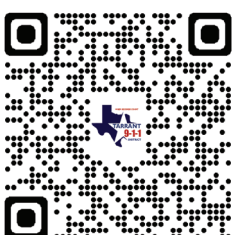
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Market

continued from page 1

As the day went on and clouds shifted, the market only got busier. An hour after opening, almost all of the Preble Family Produce’s goods had sold. Owner Micheal Preble said they also work with The Roadside Stand, a farmers market in Fort Worth. As it was their first time doing business in Arlington, he said the community support meant a lot.

“We’re going to have to probably reevaluate how we stock,” Preble said. Produce vendors sold vegetables such as potatoes and carrots, while others offered mushrooms, jellies and chocolate.

As spring settles in, farmers will have more opportunities to grow varieties of produce to sell at the market as the year proceeds.

Garret Martin, Downtown Arlington Management Corp. vice president, said there is room for the farmers market to grow in the future, but Saturday was a great first step in the process. “The goal of today’s market was to do something successful that activated on the long-term need for a



The Shorthorn: Samarie Goffney

Dana Thompson, Dish It Po-Boys & Thangs owner, makes a po'boy during the Downtown Arlington Farmers Market on March 29 at the corner of Front and Center streets. Thompson vends from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Sunday at the Dalworthington Farmers Market.

farmers market,” Martin said. Fort Worth resident Zach Arnold, 31, said he heard about the market through social media. “Being a former resident and a local, I like supporting local businesses and

wanted to see how many vendors I could come out and support,” Arnold said. Events like these are important because they allow residents to engage with their neighbors and support multiple local vendors

in one place, he said. With the market accompanying Rotary Dream Park and Doggie Depot with a short walk over the train tracks to the George W. Hawkes Downtown Library,

residents and visitors alike have plenty to explore in the area. “Whenever you see a community need and you respond to that community need, you’re going to have a successful product in your

community,” Martin said. “It’s going to bring a lot of energy. That’s what we’re doing here. We’re responding to a need.”

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The Shorthorn: Samarie Goffney

Attendees gather at the Downtown Arlington Farmers Market on March 29 at the corner of Front and Center streets. The market will be open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Saturday through November.



The Shorthorn: Samarie Goffney

Wind chimes hang from a tent during the Downtown Arlington Farmers Market on March 29 at the corner of Front and Center streets. DiBello Designs owner Jackie DiBello sold tumblers and wind spinners.

THE SHORTHORN

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CAMPUS

From stray to stardom: A cat is a celebrity at UTA



The Shorthorn: Christine Vo

Aerospace engineering freshman Miranda Lee pets Microwave on March 13 between Ransom and College halls. Lee said Microwave gets fed about once a day any time between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Microwave, a gray and white cat, is a well-known campus icon and companion

BY DANG LE
The Shorthorn staff

In front of the Chemistry and Physics Building, he welcomes the sun's warmth on his face.

He gently closes his eyes, feeling the balmy air of early spring.

His ears twitch as students move between classes.

Days like these are usual for Microwave, UTA's well-known campus cat.

His origins are unknown. His oldest documented photo was taken in 2014. Since then, the gray and white stray cat has become one of the most prominent UTA figures.

Posts about the short-haired feline on UTA's Reddit garner hundreds of likes and dozens of comments.

"He's very iconic," said McKayla Mellen, Campus Cat Coalition president.

"So many people know about him more than they know the other cats or even about us."

Microwave's popularity has helped the Campus Cat Coalition grow its influence, which the club uses to educate the UTA community about cats, Mellen said.

He's also a model. The club has sold stickers of Microwave for fundraising.

A couple of semesters ago, Microwave had a wound on his back. Donations poured in to pay for his vet bills. Once healed, the extra money supported other cats, Mellen said.

The Campus Cat Coalition doesn't benefit from any donations or sales as they go directly back to the animals, said Caroline Carter, alumna and an original member of the club's third iteration in 2019.

Microwave accompanied Carter throughout her bachelor's to master's degree journey at UTA. She would meet him at the UTA Planetarium to walk to Science Hall or the University Center.

"He's very iconic. So many people know about him more than they know the other cats or even about us."

McKayla Mellen
Campus Cat Coalition president

Even if it was raining. "I pulled up my umbrella, and Microwave and I would walk," she said. "He'd walk me to and from my building or to the UC so I would grab his breakfast."

Microwave's previous name was Buddy. When the club became more active, it began naming the campus cats officially. He and other cats were named after appliances.

These days, he's sometimes referred to as Dr. Wave. He's a man of honor.

Microwave has doctorate degrees in chemistry and physics.

"Because of the Chemistry and Physics Building right there," Mellen said.

He's a multidisciplinary scholar. He possesses an honorary doctorate in English.

"Because he's also beloved by the English department," she said.

Microwave has a small, beige plastic house with a blue, slanted top. Above the entrance, a small string of photos of him is attached.

A sticker on the front reads "Microwave's House." A sign nearby asking passersby not to feed him.

"Some people will feed him anything and everything from the cafeteria," Carter said.

She appreciates people's kindness, but the club manages Microwave's weight and health.

"We have to tell them, 'Please do not feed him corn casserole. Do not give him Panda Express chicken.' He will eat it, but do not give it to him," she said.

Microwave gets fed about once a day any time between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., said aerospace engineering freshman Miranda Lee, who's part of the Campus Cat Coalition feeding and PR teams.

Last semester, Lee asked him to wish her luck before a chemistry lab.

"It depends on how much you studied, if his luck will work for you or not," she said, laughing.

Mellen attributed Microwave's location and approachability — allowing people to pet and seek him out — to helping him become well-known on campus.

"It's like seeing a celebrity," she said.

The daily campus life involves lots of foot traffic.

Microwave bathes in the sunlight by his house. His front legs extended. His back legs slightly bent. His head tilted toward his chest.

And that was enough for people to stop in their tracks and capture photos of him.

Snap.

@DANGHLE
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The Shorthorn: Christine Vo

Above: Microwave looks into the distance on March 13 between Ransom and College halls. Microwave has a doctorate degree in chemistry and physics and an honorary doctorate in English.

The Shorthorn: Christine Vo

Right: Microwave has become one of the most prominent UTA figures. His popularity has helped the Campus Cat Coalition grow its influence.



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Acknowledge immigration anxiety

ICE and border patrol were on campus for a career fair, and students were scared

As posts warning of the presence of Texas Border Patrol and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials at UTA were shared on Reddit last week, students' anxiety grew, and a string of questions were raised: "Are they still here?" "Do you know why?"

The event ended up being a criminology and criminal justice career fair, which brought ICE and Texas Border Patrol officers to the Maverick Activities Center.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board believes the university could be more diligent about communicating the presence of these agencies on campus. Amid growing uncertainty on immigration, UTA can better demonstrate its understanding of those facing concerns about their status.

THE ISSUE:

UTA's recent criminology and criminal justice career fair brought ICE and border patrol officers to campus, causing fear among students amid increasing immigration raids.

WE THINK:

During uncertain times, the university and its departments could be more proactive in communicating such events.

TAKE ACTION:

There needs to be more transparency and understanding on college campuses. Student concerns should be a sign to share upcoming events on more platforms.

According to a Reddit post, some agents around the Maverick Activities Center were seen wearing plain clothes and driving unmarked vehicles.

"They are still here," one user wrote. "Their unmarked cars are parked in the West Campus Garage, as well as a van with tinted windows that's marked as a Tarrant County Jail vehicle. Spread the word to friends who need to be made aware. If an officer approaches you, you are not obligated to speak to them, so remain silent."

Misinformation spread like wildfire, out of fear. Students wondered if the agents' presence was connected to campus protests or if they were targeting certain students. Others didn't care about their motives and were more concerned about everybody's safety.

UTA became a Hispanic Serving Institution in 2014 and had a population of 34.3% Hispanic students in fall 2024. The fear of deportation continues to loom over the community due to President Donald Trump's push to target illegal immigration.



The Shorthorn: Anayah Darrett

UTA had multiple options to communicate not only the agencies' presence on campus but also the event's happenings to ease students' concerns. Though the event was posted on MavEngage and MyUTA, the university and its departments could have also used social media platforms, sent MavAlerts to the whole campus, included it on the campus events calendar or posted a sign outside and inside the Maverick Activities Center.

According to UTA's immigration FAQ page,

federal immigration enforcement officials are allowed to access public spaces, which include but are not limited to exterior grounds, lobbies and other common areas, galleries and events open to the public.

Enforcement officers, however, have more restricted access in nonpublic spaces, which include but are not limited to residence hall rooms, employee offices and classrooms.

The concerns didn't come from nowhere.

On March 25, Rumeysa Ozturk, Tufts

University doctoral student, was detained by masked federal agents while walking in Boston, according to an Associated Press article. A Department of Homeland Security spokesperson said federal authorities detained Ozturk after an investigation found she had "engaged in activities in support of Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization that relishes the killing of Americans."

Ozturk's only known activism was co-authoring an op-ed in the student newspaper, which called on Tufts to engage with student demands to cut ties with Israel.

Similarly, Mahmoud Khalil, a legal U.S. resident and Palestinian activist who protested at Columbia University, was also arrested and detained by immigration enforcement in early March. He is now facing possible deportation.

These are two of many stories from U.S. visa holders or legal residents who are in fear of deportation after Trump's administration began its crackdown on immigration and student visas.

International students, who made up 13.4% of UTA's population in fall 2024, come to the U.S. for various reasons, including better educational and career opportunities.

The Trump administration issued an executive order Jan. 30, looking to combat antisemitism by promising that the federal government will "deport Hamas sympathizers and revoke student visas."

"To all the resident aliens who joined in the pro-jihadist protests, we put you on notice: come 2025, we will find you, and we will deport you," the order read. "I will also quickly cancel the student visas of all Hamas sympathizers on college campuses, which have been infested with radicalism like never before."

As a public entity, UTA has to comply with laws and allow ICE and border agents on campus for multiple reasons — even if it's a planned event like the one on March 27. However, students could benefit from a heads-up.

While UTA has done a good job addressing immigration concerns, it doesn't have to stop there. The university should be extra cautious, with fears of deportation at an all-time high amid ongoing raids and daily news coverage.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board is made up of opinion editor Leslie Orozco; editor-in-chief Christine Vo; copy desk chief Jinelle Sánchez; associate news editor Amanda Aldridge; sports editor Matthew Tibebe; engagement editor Sairam Marupudi; copy editor James Sanderson; news reporters Shelby Carter; and Taylor Sansom; and engagement producer Jessica Arnold.

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OPINION

UTA's music department deserves more

Current resources are inadequate to propel music majors into successful careers.

The music department at UTA faces significant challenges due to inadequate performance spaces and limited practice rooms, hindering students' ability to showcase their talents and succeed in their studies.

While construction is taking place on campus every day, UTA's concert bands still rehearse and perform in Irons Recital Hall, which was not meant for large ensembles.

The stage often limits the bands' ability to perform certain pieces due to poor sound mechanics that echo and do not always carry the music well into the audience.

This makes it difficult for the bands to showcase their talent, which may also contribute to the low turnout at their concerts. The music department deserves a space that is highly functional, acoustically optimized and capable of showcasing the students' talents.

For those working toward

a music degree, practicing is not just a routine — it becomes a way of life. Students spend copious amounts of time practicing on campus.

JORDAN PRUITT



Pruitt is a political science junior and Community Voices columnist for The Shorthorn.

Join the discussion by commenting online at theshorthorn.com.

With limited practice rooms in the Fine Arts Building, students often find themselves struggling to find a place to practice unless they rehearse early in the morning or late in the evening.

Moreover, about 29% of novice music educators in Texas shared dissatisfaction

with the preparation they received for their career in college, according to a 2020 Honors College capstone project. A way to combat this would be to give future music educators valuable practice spaces to grow their skills.

The funding provided to public schools often does not allow sufficient financial support for the arts, and especially music performance.

When asked about funding for the arts in their districts, many elementary and secondary education teachers and supervisors said they believed the arts were not valued in their schools, according to a 2023 report from the National Association for Music Education. They also shared concerns for the student fees required, limiting access to join music and visual programs.

This shows that it is more important than ever to promote music in college as a valuable career.

While the university recently put more attention on funding, the effort is still insufficient to meet the department's needs.



The Shorthorn: Jay Montoya

In August 2024, UTA submitted a Legislative Appropriations Request for the 2026-27 fiscal year, requesting to maintain or increase formula rates above the 2024-25 level to keep the cost affordable for students, according to the request.

The university's priorities still seem misaligned, with greater financial support directed toward other projects

while the arts continue to receive inadequate attention.

Making the music department a priority at UTA would significantly better the students, faculty and staff in the department and potentially bring in larger audiences to performances.

Music can be very powerful and entertaining, even to those not well-versed in the performing arts, and it is vital we see

the importance of music on our campus.

The department deserves more than just incremental changes — it needs a full commitment to fostering a thriving, well-resourced program.

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Wednesday, April 2, 2025

WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL



Photo courtesy of Craig Pessman

Above: Élodie Tessier, Lady Movin' Mavs player, advances UTA on the bracket during the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Tournament on March 28 at State Farm Center in Champaign, Illinois.

Photo courtesy of Craig Pessman

Left: Lady Movin' Mavs players cheer during the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Tournament on March 28 at State Farm Center in Champaign, Illinois.

Movin' Mavs finish 2nd in national run

Both No. 2 teams advanced to the Saturday championship, falling short of a title



Photo courtesy of Craig Pessman

Movin' Mavs player Lionel Tamoki attempts a layup during the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Tournament on March 28 at State Farm Center in Champaign, Illinois.



Photo courtesy of Craig Pessman

Above: Movin' Mavs player Javed Choudhari, center, yells during the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Tournament on March 28 at State Farm Center in Champaign, Illinois.

Right: Brittany Yeomans, Lady Movin' Mavs player, right, attempts a layup during the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Tournament on March 28 at State Farm Center in Champaign, Illinois.



BASKETBALL

Illustration by Haley Walton

MAVERICKS MOURN

Former Lady Maverick Rebekah Van Dijk, who died March 12, is remembered as a record-setter and beloved teammate

BY MATTHEW TIBEBE
The Shorthorn sports editor

“She bled blue and orange.”

That was the sentiment Shereka Wright, women’s basketball head coach, recalled of former Lady Maverick Rebekah Van Dijk.

On March 12, the UTA legend died. Van Dijk, 29, played from 2014 to 2018 and is notably the only Lady Maverick to have her jersey retired.

In her four years at UTA, the star center averaged 13.9 points and nine rebounds per game.

“She was probably one of the best bigs they had in the league,” Wright said. “Her ability, her skill set to be able to dominate inside the post and to be able to face up were some things that was very, very important.”

Her rebounding dominance was a reflection of her character and work ethic, said Krista Gerlich, former women’s basketball head coach. She recalled Van Dijk growing up on a farm and milking cows early in the morning.

“She did hard work her entire life, and that’s what rebounding is. It’s just hard work,” she said.

In Gerlich’s first season at UTA, the team only won four games. When Van Dijk enrolled as a freshman the following year, the team increased its win total to 17.

“It was the largest turnaround in the nation in Division I that year in women’s basketball,” Gerlich said. “I will forever be grateful to her for believing in us before she could even see what we were going to do.”

Van Dijk wasn’t just a great talent, she was someone opposing teams created defensive game plans for. Her strong hands, passing ability and catching radius were a few things opponents struggled to defend.

“When you’re a player in a conference where people are having to create their game plan around limiting you, that speaks to the type of talent that you’re giving,” said deputy athletic director Debbie Garcia.

Although the now-infamous transfer portal wasn’t much in that era, Gerlich said she appreciated Van Dijk’s loyalty to UTA while she was being recruited by other teams.

“It tells you how she was raised. She understood family, and it just speaks to her character about loyalty,” she said.

Although Van Dijk was unstoppable on the court, the Maverick community remembers her for her character and big heart.

Former teammate Brooke Al-

exander reflected on her and Van Dijk’s dynamic on the court and how she was initially attracted to UTA at the prospect of playing with a “big-time post player.”

Given that Alexander was the primary ball handler, the tandem directly influenced each other’s success on the court. Recruited for the point guard position, Alexander said the team’s vision was to play a two-man game with Van Dijk.

“One of my strengths was playing off a big post player like Bek and getting the ball to them,” Alexander said in an email. “I was always great friends with any post player I played with because our chemistry on the court was so strong because I fed them the ball.”

Alexander said she was in a depressed season in her life coming into UTA, and Van Dijk was the one to comfort her in those moments. Through Van Dijk, she was able to connect with Bible study groups and find community off the court.

“Bekah didn’t care what anyone else thought. If she liked it, she was going to go all out in it,” she said.

Alexander considers Van Dijk her first friend at UTA, with whom she participated in various organizations and attended Texas Rangers games.

Van Dijk was an NCAA Woman of the Year nominee in 2018. The title highlights the player’s combined athletic, academic and community impact.

Garcia said those closest to Van Dijk knew the two things that influenced her.

“Everybody who knew her will know that her faith and her family, those were the most important things to her,” she said.

Before heading to Las Vegas for the Western Athletic Conference Tournament in March, the Lady Mavericks honored Van Dijk with a patch on their jerseys. Garcia said she was extremely proud of Wright and her staff for taking the initiative to honor Van Dijk.

“She’s our guardian angel. We wanted to represent her in a way to bring light and to give her her respect because she is one of the most recognizable players that we’ve had here,” Wright said. “It was only right to honor her and to wear her number and her initials on our jersey, and I do believe that she was with us during that time.”

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Sports editor: shorthorn@uta.edu



File photo / Shorthorn staff

Former Lady Maverick Rebekah VanDijk poses with her family in honor of retiring her jersey during halftime in a game against Texas State University on Jan. 20 at College Park Center.

“Everybody who knew her will know that her faith and her family, those were the most important things to her.”

Debbie Garcia
deputy athletic director

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“She did hard work her entire life, and that’s what rebounding is. It’s just hard work.”

Krista Gerlich
former women’s basketball head coach

Led Division I freshmen with 15 double-doubles



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