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[@thedailytexan](#): Notice: The May 6 draft of the PSAC report concerning the Cactus Cafe is available again, and can be viewed here <http://ht.ly/2b2aP>

## Law requires information be available to students

By Aaron West, Daily Texan Staff  
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Students will have access to more information than ever before concerning their education when HB 2504 goes into effect Aug. 15.

The law, authored by state Rep. Lois Kolkhorst (R-Brenham) and passed in May 2009, requires, among other obligations, that all public Texas colleges and universities increase the information available for each undergraduate course offered and publish that data online within three mouse-clicks of the institution's home page and make it accessible without a user name or password.

"It's just to give students and parents more information before they enroll in the course," said Chris Steinbach, chief of staff for Rep. Kolkhorst. "A university education is a huge purchase in a student's life and the idea is that they should be able to see a syllabus of a course before they enroll. To empower consumers. It's a transparency issue."

The enhanced course information must include a detailed syllabus of the course, a curriculum vitae for the professor — a record of a professor's degrees, published works and background — and, if available, a departmental operating budget from the most recent semester or academic term when the institution offered the course. All UT budgets are available on [UT's chief financial officer's website](#).

"I believe that students should have access to information about the courses that they're planning on taking," said Neal Armstrong, UT's vice provost for faculty affairs and one of the people who organized the implementation of the bill at UT. "The current catalog information is helpful but pretty brief. This system gives students a much better idea about what is in the course and who the faculty is. It helps students make a more informed decision about classes they want to take."

Rep. Kolkhorst, who chaired the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Education until 2009, oversaw budgets in education funding, and according to Steinbach, became concerned with empowering students and the people involved in their education by supplying them with information that wasn't readily available before.

Despite the law's noble origins, some Texas institutions complain that the changes will cost the schools too much, especially in the light of the state's recent budget cuts.

"I really think this is not going to be at all beneficial to the student," said Martyn Gunn, vice provost for academic affairs at Texas A&M University in an interview with the Houston Chronicle. "We're faced with laying off faculty in the next biennium to meet the budget cuts, and here we are spending a couple of hundred thousand dollars to implement this."

Gunn didn't respond to requests for a statement by press time.

Justin Keener, vice president of policy and communications for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, said it was to believe Gunn's remarks.

"I was surprised to see that the bill cost Texas A&M hundreds of thousands of dollars," Keener said. "I've asked to see data to support that. If they gold plate it, it could probably cost that much. But I'm sure you could find a much more cost-effective way to [implement the law]. If they want to inflate the cost, though, they could do it. When a state agency doesn't want to do something, they inflate the cost."

Regardless of costs, which UT hasn't estimated, according to Armstrong, the University will comply with the law.

"We teach several thousand courses a year here," Armstrong said. "The revised content is a little more elaborate than what we've been requiring, but even given that, a good portion of the faculty's customized syllabi are that detailed or even more. Nevertheless, the syllabi will be prepared and we'll post them on a database retrieval system that's being developed to adhere to the bill's 'three-click' policy. I think there's value to the system."

Armstrong said that most of the revamped information will be online by the beginning of the fall semester. The new bill mandates that all the syllabi and curricula vitae are posted within seven days after the start of classes. UT began implementing the changes to the system late last fall.

"We've been meeting periodically to work out the various elements of the system," Armstrong said. "The programming, the contents, the format for the syllabi and the curriculum vitae — we'll have it by August 15 or before."

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**David** 1 hour ago

I think this is absolutely tremendous. I can't really say how many times I've browsed the course catalog and looked for a course syllabus only to find nothing. Sure, this might demand that professors get their asses in gear and release their syllabi a bit earlier, but that's not a big problem, I don't think. Good job (for once), Texas State Legislature.

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