

SUBJECT: UT-Austin fee for Barbara Jordan and Cesar Chavez statues and scholarships

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Morrison, F. Brown, Chavez, J. Jones, Mercer

0 nays

3 absent — Giddings, Nixon, Smithee

WITNESSES: For — Elizabeth C. Green; Brian Haley, University of Texas at Austin Student Government; Julie Sowa, University of Texas at Austin Student Body

Against — None

On — James W. Vick, University of Texas at Austin

BACKGROUND: Education Code, Ch. 54 governs tuition and fees for all Texas institutions of higher education. In 1995, the 74th Legislature enacted Education Code, sec. 54.5133, permitting the University of Texas at Austin (UT) Board of Regents to collect a \$1 fee per semester or summer session from students from September 1, 1995 through August 31, 1999. The fee was directed to fund the construction of a Martin Luther King, Jr., statue on the UT campus and to establish Martin Luther King, Jr., scholarships. The statute has been completed and the remaining fees have gone to the scholarship fund.

DIGEST: HB 1537 would permit the UT Board of Regents to collect a \$2 fee per semester or summer session from students to fund the construction of statues of Barbara Jordan and Cesar Chavez on the UT campus, and to establish Barbara Jordan and Cesar Chavez scholarship funds. One-half of the revenue raised would be dedicated to the Barbara Jordan statue and scholarship fund and the other half would be dedicated to the Cesar Chavez statue and scholarship fund. Fees would be charged beginning in the fall 2003 semester until August 31, 2007.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Several years ago, UT received permission to procure funding for a statue of Martin Luther King, Jr., by the same means as proposed in this bill. The statue has been a huge success on campus — events are held there, it is a gathering place for students, and it has had a positive effect on the university. Allowing UT to dedicate statues to Barbara Jordan and Cesar Chavez similarly would benefit the university.

Noticing a lack in statues on campus dedicated to well recognized and respected women, African-Americans, and Hispanics, current students began seeking a means to build such statues. Students were polled as to who they wanted the statues to represent, and they chose Barbara Jordan and Cesar Chavez. This spring, a majority of UT students passed a referendum backing the proposed fee increases.

These statues would be a visible expression to students, faculty, and staff, visitors, and prospective students of a respect for different cultures, diversity, and equality. Recently, there has been a lot of racial tension on campus, fueled by insensitive actions, such as the fraternity member who dressed in “black face” for Halloween last year and allegations of racial profiling by the university police. These statues would help heal these wounds and allow students to express the respect for other cultures that exists among most members of the UT community.

The increase in fees allowed by this bill would be minimal — less than buying a soda at a sporting event. Although donations also would be accepted, a fee-based fund raising method would be the only feasible way to get the statues built.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

All students should not be forced to pay a compulsory fee to honor people who espoused political views that certain students might disagree with or might even find offensive. Students should be allowed to opt out of paying the fee.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 1443 by Barrientos, was reported favorably, without amendment, by the Senate Education Subcommittee on Higher Education on April 24.