

RED LIGHT

UTD SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICIES THREATEN COMETS' LIBERTIES



UTD should amend its Student Grievances policy to match the definition of sexual harassment in its Sexual Misconduct Policy. While firm anti-harassment policies are important and necessary, inconsistent and extrajudicial definitions of sexual harassment threaten students' constitutional right to free speech.

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, a nonprofit

dedicated to protecting free speech on US college campuses, has declared Student Grievances a "red light" policy, meaning its content is unconstitutional. FIRE claims the policy defines sexual harassment too broadly, leaving room for UTD to censor students for speech protected by federal law. And UTD already has a poor track record around speech — earlier this year, UTD sanctioned

a Comet for insulting traffic cops using obscene but constitutionally protected expression. A letter from FIRE prompted UTD to reverse the sanctions, but the precedent of over policing free expression in the name of school policy has already been established.

Other universities have already used loose sexual harassment policies to unfairly restrict student ex-

pression. In 2017, a group of Arcadia University students created an art exhibit criticizing then-President Donald Trump, depicting his likeness on a penis. Arcadia investigated these students under Title IX — sexual harassment law — even though this is completely protected speech. While the investigation was dropped, a legal battle could have ensued — and even if the Arcadia

students won, campus morale would be shaken. Who would feel safe expressing themselves if it could end in an expensive court case? The university would be practicing soft censorship.

UTD has two policies on punishable sexual misconduct, each offering different definitions. UTD-

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Antisocial campus? Try sports

Embracing sports culture at UTD will bring Comets together and invigorate campus

KARLEY BOLENBAUGH
Mercury Staff

UTD's lack of a sports culture is a direct culprit for the school's lack of a social scene. Luckily, this is something Comets can easily change by stepping outside their comfort zone and giving sports a try.

It's no secret UTD has a unique student culture when compared to most public universities. In 2018, the Princeton review ranked UTD No. 4 for most unhappy student body population. This is hardly a surprise — a quick trip to the school's unofficial Reddit page shows a wall of daily complaints. UTD students are not happy. But why?

UTD lacks a vibrant social atmosphere or any sense of community. Several factors contribute to this: a large population of commuters, an academically-focused student body and a lack of school pride.

Commuting is an unchangeable factor and academics should never be ignored, but the lack of school pride that exists at UTD can and should be improved upon. The easiest way for Comets to do so is to invest their time in the school, particularly in live sporting events.

Being able to share our excitement or sadness at our school's wins or losses creates a sense of community that is sorely lacking on campus — sports are a huge morale booster. A 2022 study published by Frontiers in Public Health found that attending live sporting events not only decreases loneliness, but also increases life satisfaction. Attending games can not only boost school spirit, but a person's spirit as well, leading to a better, happier UTD.

Engaging with concerts and clubs are good ways to break into social life at UTD, but campus sports represent the heart of

the school itself and are the pinnacle of social events. Our sports teams represent our school and our school alone, as they are a reflection of every Comet on campus. And attending games is a way for all Comets, regardless of interests, to come together and show our school pride.

I will admit, even I am not the biggest athletics fan. Until I came to UTD, I had only been to one or two basketball games, a football game and a handful of hockey games years ago. But since attending UTD, I have found a love for being a part of the audience and cheering my fellow Comets on. The stands may not be packed, but the excitement that ripples throughout it every time a three-pointer or a goal is made tells me that a full crowd could work wonders for UTD.

If convenience is a worry, it's never been a better time to follow UTD sports. Recently,



YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

UTD's athletics department revamped their website and merch, making it easier than ever to access news about games and show support. Admittance to any UTD game is free with a Comet Card and provides a great opportunity to meet and socialize with fellow Comets, as well as support our student athletes.

UTD's sports teams are wildly successful

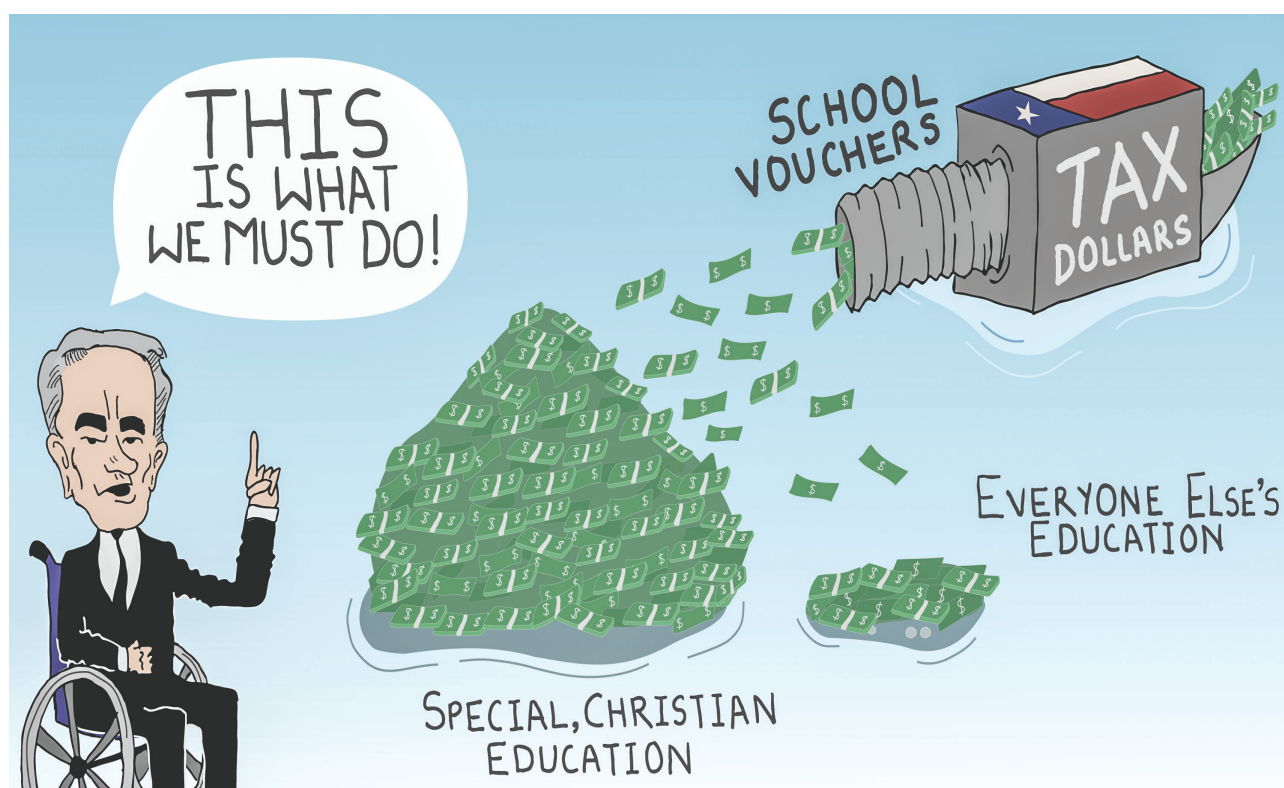
and worth watching. The UTD women's basketball team won the ASC championship title last season, the men's soccer team grabbed an ASC win this season, UTD's esports team is currently ranked top 12 in the nation and our football team is undefeated. Of course, we don't actually have a

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Abbott's failures unmask the facade of "school choice"

School voucher programs siphon money away from public education, and UTD could become collateral damage

JUSTIN KIM
Courtesy



SHUBHAM SHEKHAR JHA | MERCURY STAFF

The Texas Legislature's fourth special session is underway, with the House committee advancing the school voucher bill after the previous special session saw stalemate on the issue. Despite Gov. Greg Abbott's relentless crusading, the legislature's hesitance to pursue voucher programs shows that Texans see "school choice" for what it really is: an attack on K-12 public education. Comets should take heed of how these initiatives strip schools of their resources and damage education as a whole.

Abbott has long urged for providing education savings accounts, or ESAs, which divert public funds to private schools. ESAs are taxpayer-funded savings accounts that parents can use to pay for private school expenses. According to the Legislative Budget Board, implementing SB 1 — the voucher bill that passed the Sen-

ate last session — would have had a biennial cost of \$500 million. Thus, a voucher program would not only decrease funding and enrollment in public schools but pose a significant financial burden on the state as well.

The current push for school vouchers is just the latest in the Texas GOP's series of attacks on public education. During the regular session, Republicans successfully passed a bill that bans certain books from school libraries (HB 900), a bill that bans DEI offices on public university campuses (SB 17), and a bill that weakens tenure at public universities (SB 18). These laws limit academic freedom, hurt the multiculturalism of our campuses and make Texas universities less competitive overall. Moreover, they demonstrate that attacks on public education are not limited to primary and secondary schools, but target col-

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