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# TxExplainer: The 2017 Legislative Session Is Over. So Now What?

BY DANIELLE LOPEZ IN 40 ACRES ON JUNE 5, 2017 AT 1:27 PM | NO COMMENTS

As the 2017 Texas Legislative session kicked into high gear, tensions were high—bills were filed, laws were made, and even a fight [nearly broke out](#). From funding higher education across Texas to the [Permanent University Fund](#) to campus sexual assault, the Texas Legislature spent the last 140 days debating UT-Austin’s future. Now that the session has come to a close and all is said and done, here’s what changed—and what didn’t.



## Funding Higher Ed

For a while there, [it seemed like the Senate was going to reduce higher ed funding across the state](#), cutting UT-Austin’s core state funding by 10 percent. Instead, the university received a 1.78% increase, setting the 2018-19 budget at \$835.6 million. What’s the catch? This increase in funding might not continue after 2019. The [university’s recurring base funding was reduced by about \\$27 million](#) a year, meaning that funding may not be available in future years to pay for operational and instructional expenses. On top of that, funding for special items—like McDonald Observatory, the Marine Science Institute in Port Aransas, and the Bureau of Economic Geology—was reduced by an average of 30 percent, but not stricken from state appropriations completely. The legislature will appoint an interim committee to review the future need of those so-called special items.

## University Research Funding



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Although the Governor’s University Research Initiative, [which adds \\$40 million to help universities attract world-class researchers](#), is continued but reduced to \$15.6 million, the legislature cut funding for the Texas Research University Fund by 15 percent to \$55 million for UT-Austin for 2018-19. The TRUF provides investment for research expenditures at UT-Austin and Texas A&M.

### Financial Aid

The Texas Grant Program received an increase of \$71 million in General Revenue, raising the total budget to \$786 million. This fund will support around 92 percent of eligible students for the biennium in Texas.

### Dell Medical School

The new Dell Medical School is the first medical school to be built on an AAU-recognized research university in nearly 50 years. Though there was debate over securing funding for the school, the legislature’s finalized budget included the Dell Medical School in health-related formula funding, appropriating \$12.1 million.

### Campus Sexual Assault

In March the UT System released a statewide survey that found [15 percent of students at UT-Austin had been the victims of rape](#). In an effort to combat campus sexual assault, the Texas Legislature passed several policies—led by Sen. Kirk Watson—to reduce sexual assaults and make reporting them to universities more accessible. This includes amnesty, which prevents penalizations for offenses like underage drinking, and a requirement for universities to provide an option to electronically report sexual assault.

### Top 10 Percent

Leading up to the session, there was debate over whether the state should continue the “Top 10 Percent” rule, which guarantees students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their high school class automatic admission to a Texas public university. But no changes were made by the legislature and the university will still be required to use automatic admission for at least 75 percent of its freshman class.

### The Permanent University Fund

The PUF was also another point of contention leading up to the legislative session. Established in the Texas Constitution in 1876, the PUF is a public endowment system supporting the University of Texas and Texas A&M University Systems. Some legislators proposed reducing the fund or including more Texas universities. But as of the session’s close, no changes were made to the PUF.

**Tags:** [higher ed](#), [Permanent University Fund](#), [PUF](#), [texas lege](#), [tuition](#), [TXEXplainer](#)

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