

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS



Texas UIL

High School 2021-22
NOTES



UIL CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS NOTES

Academic Year: 2021-2022

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THE STARTING POINT

Welcome to another year of **UIL Current Issues & Events** (CI&E). The purpose of this manual is to help prepare you as a student and your coach for one of the League's most interesting and challenging competitions. But first, a statement of the obvious: We can no better predict what will happen between now and March 2022 than you can.

Sure, we can say with some certainty that conflict will continue in the Middle East and that politicians will continue to fight in the name of their political party. We just don't know who, when, where or why.

The intention of this booklet is to be the **starting point**. This should give participants a backdrop for viewing and analyzing news across the state, country and world. The manual can be taken apart and put into a three-ring binder, but it cannot be copied for sharing (see the copyright note at the bottom and the full copyright notice on the back of the title page). From there, each student can add pages with additional or related news as it is encountered or expand on a topic that is lightly introduced or covered with some hard facts or with an article you find particularly insightful.

Consider this a workbook that provides an outline or overview of what students need to know. It's a primer and a guide to show participants where and how to begin. Students who can master the information in these notes will understand the context in which events and issues exist, and they'll have gone a long way toward being a productive member of their CI&E team.

News is a moving target! It can change every day and sometimes multiple times a day. For instance, did anyone know anything about COVID-19 when the 2019 school year started? This outbreak has built into a pandemic and affected every person in our country and much of the world. Things will be continually changing, and it's your job to keep up with all of it.



THE BARE MINIMUM

This manual does not replace reading a first-rate metropolitan newspaper or news website. We do not recommend usage of any source that espouses a particular political ideology. It's your job to find an objective, comprehensive source of news. The Texas Tribune is invaluable for state stories, and we recommend exploring Al-Jazeera, Reuters and BBC News for U.S. and international reporting. It's great to seek different points of view. If the Drudge Report, Glenn Beck and InfoWars are your main sources of information, good luck.

Regardless, you can't understand the "why" and "how" and potential impact of what's happening in the world if you don't know the "who," "what" and "where" of the world's main events. Students who possess this knowledge are not only more likely to win at this contest, they are more likely to participate in civic life, move up career ladders, succeed in college and generally have the esteem that comes with being regarded as an educated person. This is not an insignificant matter. Don't underestimate its importance.

Learn to distinguish between "factual news" and "fake news." According to a Pew Research Center study, Americans consider fake news a larger problem than racism, climate change and terrorism, and it suggests that fake news may be accelerating the process of polarization. In the days of Walter Cronkite, the news was simply reported as it occurred. In today's world, the news is analyzed, usually either from a conservative or liberal point of view, as it is reported. The result is biased reports, and much of this stems from information given by politicians and activist groups. Always cross-check your information. If you don't know how, ask. Being aware of current events isn't true awareness if you have bad information, and in many cases, it can be worse, so verify, verify, **verify!**

Timeliness of tests is tricky as most tests are written far enough before a meet that they can be edited and replicated for distribution. Most of the "current" news starts about the middle or end of August. Gauge how important an event or person is in the grand scheme, and center on those entities. An event occurring in small-town Texas has few ramifications, but a violent demonstration in a major city has far-reaching consequences.

This text is focused on what we perceive as pivotal people, places and issues. In other words, we've tried to provide more about Ukraine and not so much about Uruguay. However, something may happen in Uruguay or Timbuktu that is important, so don't forget they are out there.

THE UIL RULES

The basis of this contest is the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules and the UIL Current Issues & Events Manual. Both provide specific information about rules, policies, teams, wild cards and all the other technical details students don't necessarily need to know but coaches do. That information is available for free on the UIL website, and we won't duplicate much of it in this manual. We highly recommend that you order a set of last year's tests for insight into how typical areas are covered or questions are asked.

Regarding the information in this manual, notice that when we include an entry of an obscure person or place, it is because we think that entity is important enough to monitor. It is also good to understand the context in which this entity exists. Hopefully, this manual will paint the big picture so that you can fill in the gaps with specific information as events occur.

The bottom line is that we're writing this in the summer of 2021. Issues and events to be covered in the district, region and state meets will take place between September 1, 2021, and April 2022. You'll need to collect, store and retrieve data from every viable, reliable news source available if you hope to succeed in CI&E.

CI&E COMPETITORS

There is plenty of evidence out there to show that many high school students are not culturally literate. The majority of Americans couldn't tell what "GOP" stands for according to a 60 Minutes/Vanity Fair poll a few years ago. Government of the People? Grumpy Old People? Government in Power? Try again. According to the poll, only 45% of Americans answered correctly: The Grand Old Party are today's Republicans.

Only one in four Americans could name more than one of the five freedoms guaranteed by the First Amendment — freedom of speech, of religion, of press, of assembly and of petition for redress of grievances — according to a 2006 McCormick Tribune Freedom Museum survey.

Yet students who participate in the CI&E competition demonstrate their knowledge and mastery of topics ranging from the unrest in the Middle East to the subtleties of Texas politics, from the latest technological developments to the status of COVID-19, which is relatively new. Year in and year out, students show that they can engage in the significant issues around the world and have fun doing so.

THE ESSAY - IT COUNTS

At the UIL State Meet, it is uncommon for a participant to score a perfect 40 on the objective portion of the test, although one person did in 2017. Occasionally, we

have a tie, and this is broken by the essay. One four-way tie for first place a few years ago was easily broken by the essay. One essay clinched the first place. But there was still a three-way tie for second place. Again, turn to the essay for the top six, and the student in sixth place moved up to second. The student in fifth place moved up to third. Thus, three of the four in a tie for first place did not end up in the first three places.

However, that's not the only reason that the essay matters. According to a LinkedIn survey of nearly 300 hiring managers in the U.S., communication skills top the list of skills employers want. Employers are demanding that prospective employees become better at communication skills, both in speaking and writing. Unfortunately, many students are not learning these skills in high school.

Learning to write a good essay does more than just teach students how to write better. It pushes students to refine their critical thinking and complex reasoning skills. So, students who come from high school into college with better than average writing skills and better than average critical thinking skills are going to be, well, better than average.

A GOOD ESSAY

The UIL rubric for the essay specifies what makes a top-notch essay:

- An essay that opens with a declarative statement that extends the prompt without restating it
- An essay with a thesis that is supported by substantial, relevant information that analyzes the prompt from a range of perspectives — for example, political, social, cultural and economic — without being a mere shopping list of facts
- An essay that interprets the facts without editorializing
- An essay that is well-written and organized with few spelling, grammar or punctuation errors
- An essay that is clear, precise and succinct

So, start at the beginning, just as the judges will do. For some judges, it's hard to get past a weak beginning. Next, avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published. Until you get to be the president or a noted journalist, few people outside your circle of friends or family will value your opinion. And sometimes not even then. The essay is an exercise in expository writing, not persuasive writing. Learn the difference. If you are not sure, speak with your English teacher.

Many prompts for the last few years could have covered something about former President Donald Trump, from his tweets to changing staff members to his first pieces of executive orders. This year, we will likely see more about President Joe Biden, but there is a lot going

on in the U.S., the world and Texas besides issues about presidents. The multiple-choice questions allow students to demonstrate their breadth of knowledge. The essay allows students to demonstrate their depth of knowledge.

The structure of the essay probably best resembles those fifth-grade essays: introduction, supporting paragraphs, conclusion. But it doesn't have to as long as it has a structure. The best way to ensure that there is structure is to jot down an outline before ever writing a word. The outline doesn't have to be elaborate. It's just a plan. Then follow that plan.

Start by reading the prompt again. No matter how much a student might like for the prompt to be about American politics, it turns out that it's about the turmoil in the Middle East, a topic that recurs at some level every year. Make sure the thesis statement is on the topic at hand; it cannot just be altered to a topic with which you are familiar and can expand. Then jot down between three and five supporting points. These are the things the writer knows the most about the subject. Fill in the little details later. For example, on the topic of border security, a student might write:

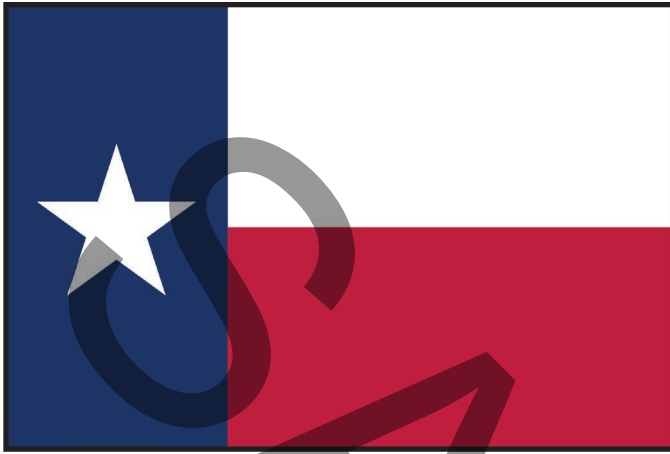
- **Thesis:** Controversy raged over the idea of building a wall to protect the U.S. along the Mexican border. Discuss the current status of the wall.
- **First point:** The length of the border with Mexico is over 1,900 miles.
- **Second point:** About one-third of the wall was completed in May 2020.
- **Third point:** President Joe Biden issued an order to cease construction on the wall.
- **Conclusion:** In the past six months, the number of people crossing the border illegally has escalated. COVID-19 testing on the large numbers is not sustainable, so the disease is rapidly being brought into the U.S. from the border. Changes will likely have to be instituted to enable a better path to citizenship and better control of the number of immigrants.

Between the major ideas, focus on the transitions. The essay should have a clear, organized, logical order, and information should flow from one idea to the next. A shorter, well-organized and focused essay is better than a longer, rambling essay.

The rubric also says the essay must be organized and well-written, and with that in mind, edit, edit, edit. It doesn't have to be long. After all, students competing probably only have 20-30 minutes to write the essay. Use that time wisely. Students who are often the last ones finished have taken time to plan and outline, write, edit and then reread. Saving time for editing is critical for a sound essay that is exacting, compelling and indicative of a strong knowledge base.

For the record, students have received perfect scores on the essay. In 2019, no one did. The high score was a 9, and there was only one of them. The average overall was a 5.7, ranging from 1-9, pretty similar to prior years.

TEXAS



KEY ELECTED OFFICEHOLDERS

- Governor - Greg Abbott
- Lieutenant Governor - Dan Patrick
- Attorney General - Ken Paxton
- Comptroller - Glenn Hegar
- Land Commissioner - George P. Bush
- Agriculture Commissioner - Sid Miller
- Chief Justice - Nathan L. Hecht

GREG ABBOTT (R) - Governor Abbott has held the highest office in the state since his first term began in 2015 and was reelected in 2018. He is the head of the executive branch of the government in Texas.

The Texas Legislature passed 1,073 bills in 2021 during its 87th session. Abbott vetoed 20 bills during this regular legislative session, which was the lowest number of vetoes since 2005 when Rick Perry also vetoed 20. Abbott used a line-item veto when he signed the state budget that denied funding when the Texas Democrats broke quorum and walked out in order to block Senate Bill 7 (SB 7), which would have increased voter restrictions.

Over the past year, Abbott issued disaster declarations across the state in the wake of the pandemic that killed more than 50,000 Texans, the winter storm that left millions without power for days during freezing temperatures and hurricanes and floods that eliminated homes and infrastructure. In May 2021, Abbott declared a disaster for 34 Texas counties based on the drastic increase of illegal immigration across the border from Mexico. His request asked for \$250 million in funds appropriated by the Texas Legislature for the border wall construction. This last declaration caused disagreement as to whether it was within the executive branch's

emergency powers since a disaster declaration was generally used for a natural disaster. Abbott will likely face legal challenges and opposition from private landowners, environmentalists and border residents that could delay or derail his plan, but the biggest hurdle he will face is the federal government, which is unlikely to give any federal land since Biden issued an executive order upon taking office that termed the border wall a "waste of money" and "not a serious policy solution."

Endorsed by former President Trump in June for the 2022 state elections, Abbott may face State Sen. Don Evans and Sen. Allen West, who formerly served as the chair of the Republican Party of Texas. Other names that have come up to possibly oppose Abbott included former U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke, political commentator Chad Prather, politician Patrick Wynne and actor Matthew McConaughey.

DAN PATRICK (R) - Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick is serving his second term, and with that title, he presides over the Texas Senate. His plan is to seek a third term in 2022. His priorities for the July special session are three bills that did not pass the House. Mike Collier, the Democratic nominee from 2018, announced that he plans to challenge Patrick again in the 2022 election for lieutenant governor.

KEN PAXTON (R) - A criminal case involving Texas' attorney general has inched along since his indictment in 2015 of securities fraud charges, and he is under investigation after several lawyers in his state agency accused him of using his office to benefit one of his donors. Paxton is facing felony counts related to private business deals in 2011 and 2012. Arguments continue over the prosecution obtaining a change of venue to Houston from Collin County, which is Paxton's hometown. Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush will possibly challenge Paxton in the next election. He will also face civil rights attorney Lee Merritt (D) and possibly former Mayor Joe Jaworski of Galveston.

GLENN HEGAR (R) - State Comptroller Glenn Hegar was elected in November 2014 and serves as Texas' chief financial officer which includes jobs such as state treasurer, check writer, tax collector, procurement officer and revenue estimator. Hegar felt that the coronavirus pandemic and low oil prices drove the general revenues in Texas down, but he is hopeful that as pandemic restrictions are lifted, there will be a resurgence of sales tax collections.

GEORGE P. BUSH (R) - Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush has the challenges of ensuring the Texas veterans get their earned benefits, overseeing investments that earn money for public education and managing state lands that produce oil and gas. Elected in 2014 for his first term, Bush secured a second term, and his current plans are to run for Texas attorney general in 2022.

SID MILLER (R) - Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller was elected in 2014 and then reelected for a second term in 2018. He announced in June that he would run for a third term. There were some rumors that he would challenge Governor Greg Abbott in the 2022 election, and he has criticized Abbott's handling of the COVID-19 situation. His tenure has been peppered with stories of questionable incidents and decisions, misuse of tax dollars and unnecessarily increased fees.

NATHAN L. HECHT (R) - Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court Nathan Hecht has been elected to the Court seven times, beginning in 1988 as a justice, and is its longest-serving member. In 2014 and 2018, he was elected as chief justice. His current term ends at the end of 2026.

87TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

The 87th regular session of the Texas Legislature began in January 2021 and ended at the end of May 2021. The Texas Legislature covered the following issues and will likely continue to address these topics in its next session.

ABORTION - Governor Greg Abbott signed SB 8 into law, and it will be effective on September 1. This measure will prohibit abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected, which can be as early as six weeks. Opponents of the legislation fear it may open the door for private citizens to sue abortion providers. While other "heartbeat" bills have been passed in other states, this law is considered one of the strictest nationwide. Abbott also signed a bill that will outlaw all abortions in Texas if the Supreme Court makes a ruling that would give states authority to prohibit procedures. During the special legislative session, he also wants to encourage lawmakers to ban abortion-inducing medications by delivery services or mail.

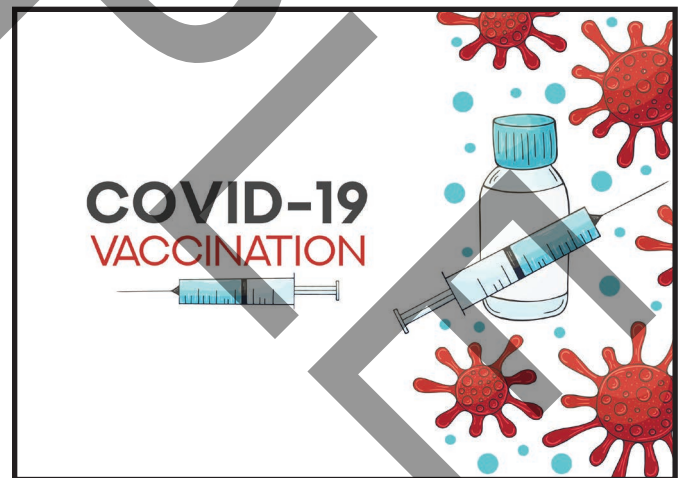
EDUCATION - Politicians, teachers and parents are debating how to teach about race and racism in the classroom, prompting a nationwide discussion on the concept of critical race theory (CRT). Governor Greg Abbott signed House Bill 3979 (HB 3979) into law which will be effective on September 1. This measure prohibits Texas schools from teaching CRT. Other topics must be taught to students, such as the institution of slavery, the his-

tory of white supremacy, the eugenics movement, the Ku Klux Klan as well as how each of these is ethically wrong. In addition, the bill provides a list of founding documents that must be taught.

CRT is a structure for analysis developed by scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. It is a study that aims to recognize how racism has shaped laws in the U.S. and how they have influenced people who are not white. Those who support CRT claim that the concept makes students aware of how U.S. systems discriminate against people who are not white. Those who are against CRT claim it is not about education, and that it attacks students for their privileges and blames them for historical offenses. It is also criticized as creating racism.

Texas lawmakers also advocated for reform of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) exams following disruption of students' learning conditions during the pandemic. Texas education officials released an analysis that revealed students were three months behind in school due to closures. HB 3261 removes the STAAR online administration deadline and provides a grant to aid school districts in employing the new online testing style.

HEALTH CARE - Some issues that will need to be continually addressed center on the COVID-19 pandemic and the repercussions that will follow. Governor Greg Abbott issued a ban on mask and vaccine mandates, and state officials continue to fight legal battles over the options to mitigate the pandemic. The rising number of cases as a result of the delta variant sparked concern in Texas as well as across the U.S.



POLICE - Police reform laws were passed, such as banning chokeholds, requiring officers to prevent colleagues from misusing force, allowing police departments to view an applicant's personnel file from a former agency and improving body camera procedures. A ban on defunding the police in large Texas cities was also passed.

POLITICS - According to a poll by the Texas Politics Project, the most important issues facing Texans in June ranked from most to least critical were immigration, border security, political corruption, voting rights, COVID-19, gun control/gun violence and energy. One of the major political issues is the divide between the Texas House Republicans and House Democrats; a majority of Democrats left the state to deny the quorum needed to pass voting restrictions during the special legislative session. As for the state budget, Comptroller Glenn Hegar said the economy was performing better than anticipated. Both parties agree that public education is a priority, but with no new sources of revenue, such as marijuana or gambling, other aspects of the budget may need to be cut. Because the census data was delayed during the Trump administration, another session will likely be utilized for redistricting next summer.

RECURRING ISSUES - Many bills that missed the deadline to be reviewed on the other side of the Texas Legislature may come back up for action.

- HB 3 would provide lawmakers more control over the governor's emergency powers in the event of a pandemic.
- HB 20 would keep more people accused of violent crimes in jail unless they post cash bonds. It would also prevent charity organizations from posting bond for people accused of violent crimes.
- SB 7 would include conditions to limit early voting hours and tighten mail-in voting.
- SB 29 would require student athletes to play on sports teams based on their sex designated at birth and not their gender identity.
- SB 10 would prohibit local governments from using taxpayer money to lobby the state.
- SB 12 would ban social media companies with 100 million monthly users or more from cancelling or discriminating against Texas users based on their views.
- SB 1311 prohibits health care providers from administering puberty blockers or hormone treatments and performing gender-confirmation surgery to those 18 years old or younger.

NEW LAWS - The following bills were passed by Texas lawmakers and signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott.

- SB 3 creates a statewide emergency system alerting Texas residents of expected power outages and requires power companies to better prepare for severe weather. (In effect.)
- SB 4 requires professional sports teams to play the national anthem before games. (Effective September 1.)
- SB 8 bans abortions in Texas as early as six weeks into pregnancy. (In effect.)
- SB 23 requires voter approval to reduce law enforcement

budgets in counties that have a population of one million or more. (Effective January 2022.)

- SB 69 bans police officers from using chokeholds when making an arrest. (Effective September 1.)
- SB 827 limits the cost for prescription insulin to \$25 per month for insured Texans. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 5 aims to expand broadband internet through the formation of the State Broadband Development Office. (In effect.)
- HB 17 prevents cities from banning natural gas. (In effect.)
- HB 54 prevents Texas law enforcement officers from participating in reality shows. (In effect.)
- HB 1024 permits restaurants to sell alcohol in to-go orders if it comes in a sealed container and is purchased with food. (In effect.)
- HB 1239 bans the closing of places of worship amidst a disaster. (In effect.)
- HB 1280 will ban abortion in Texas if Roe v. Wade is ever reversed. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 1535 allows access to medical marijuana for those with post-traumatic stress disorder or cancer. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 1900 permits Texas to withhold sales taxes from a city that defunds police and instead transfers that money to the Texas Department of Public Safety. It also freezes property tax revenues for cities that defund police with a population over 250,000 or more. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 1925 makes homeless camping a crime in prohibited spaces. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 1927 allows Texas residents to carry a handgun without a license if they're not barred by federal or state law from having a weapon. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 2366 increases the penalty for using fireworks or lasers against police officers to a felony offense. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 2675 designates "at-risk license to carry" for people who are at risk of family violence. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 3979 bans critical race theory from being taught in Texas schools. (Effective September 1.)
- HB 4492 provides a bailout provision for power companies managed by the Texas Electric Securitization Corporation. Texas consumers will be charged a fee over the coming decades to recover the cost of the bailout provision. (In effect.)