# THE COLLEGIAN

SERVING THE TARRANT COUNTY COLLEGE DISTRICT Wednesday, April 6, 2022 – Volume 35 • Issue 20



Sweet is one of them. PG. 6

# **Termination in progress**

Lawsuit leads board to act against chancellor



Photos by Alex Hoben/*The Collegian* The board voted to begin the termination process of Chancellor Eugene Giovannini's contract March 17.

# Board unanimously agrees to begin Giovannini's termination

JOSÉ ROMERO editor-in-chief are confident that the operations of the college

are in good hands under the



Vice chancellor and provost Elva LeBlanc was chosen as acting chancellor during a board meeting Feb. 17. LeBlanc will receive a monthly \$7,500 stipend.

## Provost, former student LeBlanc chosen as acting chancellor

JOSÉ ROMERO editor-in-chief I suggested that I knew everything." During the duration of her

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The board of trustees unanimously voted to begin the termination process of Chancellor Eugene Giovannini's contract March 17.

The decision was made during a specially called board meeting and is in the wake of a lawsuit filed against TCC Feb. 7. Executive vice chancellor and provost Elva LeBlanc will continue serving as acting chancellor for the time being.

"We believe this action is in the college's best long-term interest and that it is both appropriate and necessary in light of the information recently made available to the board through the independent third-party investigation," board president Teresa Ayala read from a statement. "As this process gets underway, we strong, capable leadership of Acting Chancellor Dr. Elva LeB-lanc."

Board members Gwen Morrison and Kenneth Barr declined to comment. The other trustees did not respond to requests seeking comment.

Associate general counsel Carol Bracken could not respond to requests seeking comment about the status of Giovannini's termination, the status of the investigation by the Locke Lord law firm, LeBlanc's acting chancellor term length or the lawsuit because it falls under ongoing personnel matters, pending or threatened litigation.

Giovannini has served as chancellor since 2016 and would've served until 2024 since his contract was amended, extending his term by a year.

See *Chancellor*, page 2

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Elva LeBlanc began her time with TCC sitting in chairs on NE Campus as a student, but now she finds herself running the whole thing.

LeBlanc was chosen to serve as acting chancellor while the termination process for Chancellor Eugene Giovannini is underway during a board meeting Feb. 17. In the meeting, board vice president Kenneth Barr expressed his confidence in her, saying she's "strong, respected in the community."

"As the executive vice chancellor and provost, I was already the second in command and already had a lot of the big picture information which you garner as you move up," LeBlanc said. "This next step, I am learning a lot. I would be exaggerating if appointment, she will receive a monthly \$7,500 stipend and will have the authority and responsibilities of chancellor.

While she serves, some of her main priorities are focusing on running the college and ensuring student needs are met. Student retention and recruitment are at the forefront of her current work.

Once the termination process for Giovannini is over, she's undecided about applying for the permanent chancellor position and said it's not something she's prepared to answer just yet. Giovannini's contract has due process clauses, allowing him 30 days to request a hearing.

LeBlanc referred questions about the status of Giovannini's termination, the status of the investigation by the Locke Lord

See *LeBlanc*, page 2

### TCC ending its COVID-related protocols amid declining cases

### JUAN SALINAS II senior editor juan.salinas465@my.tccd.edu

TCC sent out an email March 24 informing students, staff and faculty that it's ending COVID-19 related protocols, and the faculty's response has been mixed.

According to the email, this decision was made "in response to current [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidance and declining cases across Tarrant County." The protocols it's ending are reporting, tracking and college notifications.

Previously, it was required that students and faculty that test positive for COVID submit a diagnosis and exposure form on TCC's website.

"The TCC community has successfully adapted throughout the pandemic to circumstances as they change," Chief Operating Officer Susan Alanis said.

Alanis ensured TCC would continue to monitor the prevalence of community spread in Tarrant County and make changes if necessary.

TCC has also decided to close all district vaccination and testing sites March 31. This decision

### "I understand that we want to get things back to normal, but define normal."

Varnessa Dorsey TR instructor

was made due to the decrease in demand and the Health Resources and Services administration's decision to no longer fund COVID-19 testing or vaccinations, according to the TCC COVID-19 update webpage. "Closing the vaccine and testing sites may be problematic for some students, but there are still widely available community resources," TR assistant dean of nursing Virginia Covington said.

Despite that initial concern, Covington agrees with discontinuing self-reporting.

"Prevention protocols have always been optional at TCC, and many faculty, staff and students continue to choose that precaution," Covington said. "The North Central Texas Trauma Regional Advisory Council and the Tarrant County Public Health have determined that new Tarrant County COVID-19 cases per 100,000 people are steadily decreasing at this time with a community classification level of low."

Covington said it is a personal choice to take COVID precautions.

"Mask or no mask can be up to individuals," she said. "However, we need to ensure that those with a positive case of COVID-19 stay away from others.

TR instructor Varnessa Dorsey said the public should still be cautious of COVID because the future is still uncertain.

"I understand that we want to get things back to normal, but

See Protocols, page 2

### Entertainment

WORTH THE WAIT "Atlanta" returns with a vengeance. PG. 6

### News V

OSCARS SLAP Students react to infamous moment. PG. 3

### Women's History

FEMINISM'S STRENGTHS Event educates TCC on women's history. PG. 4

### Opinion

LACK OF EMPATHY Arguments have lost their human connection. PG. 7 Editorial

STANDING STRONG Ketanji Onyika Brown Jackson will hopefully make history. PG. 7

# THE COLLEGIAN

SERVING THE TARRANT COUNTY COLLEGE DISTRICT Wednesday, February 16, 2022 – Volume 35 • Issue 17 The gang starts a podcast PG. 4

### DISTRICT

## TCC sued for alleged wrongful termination

# Former vice president reports she dealt with toxic office conditions

### JOSÉ ROMERO editor-in-chief collegian.editor@tccd.edu

In a lawsuit filed against TCC Feb. 7, former executive vice president for advancement Kristen Bennett alleged she was wrongfully terminated for disciplining a female employee with whom Chancellor Eugene Giovannini was having an "inappropriate, personal relationship."

Bennett is seeking monetary damages for the abuse she said she endured, lost income and attorney's fees.

Bennett's attorney Frank Hill declined to comment on the suit, which was first reported by the Fort Worth Star-Telegram Feb. 8.

"Neither our law firm nor our client have any comment regarding this matter at this time," Hill's legal assistant Christian Johnsen wrote in an email.

Board of trustees president Teresa Ayala read from a statement about the lawsuit during the board meeting Feb. 11.

"The Tarrant County College District does not normally comment on pending litigation or personnel matters," she said. "However, due to the serious nature of the allegations made in the recently filed lawsuit, TCCD believes that it is important to convey that it immediately hired an independent third party to investigate the allegations when they were first brought to TCCD's attention."

TCC will respond to the lawsuit in court, according to Ayala.

Bennett was employed Oct. 1, 2020, and the lawsuit says she was terminated Jan. 31. According to the lawsuit, she was chosen by Giovannini, and he initially had nothing but praise for her team's work. The chancellor's change in attitude toward her didn't occur until Bennett was asked July 13 to discipline an unnamed female employee, who is described in the suit as Giovannini's "girlfriend."

Another employee reported that the woman told a co-worker she wanted to "choke her until her tongue comes out." Bennett asked her to apologize and informed her she had to get along with others on the team.

After doing so, Bennett was called to Giovannini's office Aug. 17, in which he said he was concerned about her boastful behavior in a prior meeting, the lawsuit said. She was called into his office again Aug. 30 and was told by the chancellor her contract wouldn't be renewed. He cited "issues" as the reason but didn't give specifics, according to the suit. Instead, he placed her on an executive development plan, another name for a personal improvement plan. In a meeting the day after, Giovannini told Bennett to only give him written reports in person to avoid having any kind of paper trail.

In September, another incident occurred



Alex Hoben/*The Collegian* Chancellor Eugene Giovannini attends a board of trustees meeting Nov. 18.

with the unnamed female employee, so Bennett disciplined her again, resulting in another meeting with Giovannini. In that meeting, he was allegedly "even more hostile" toward her.

A TCC attorney approached Bennett Oct. 28 to ask if Bennett had heard rumors of an inappropriate relationship between the chancellor and Bennett's employee. Bennett told the attorney that the employee "boasted to several people on her staff over a period of several years" about her time with Giovannini, including playing golf and going to a cigar lounge together.

The lawsuit also said TCC's associate internal general counsel told Bennett that then board of trustees president Conrad Heede warned Giovannini about this relationship.

In November, Bennett submitted her resignation, citing the emotional toll as the reason for her wanting to leave. When news of her resignation was shared with others Nov. 19, Heede asked to meet with her Nov. 24. During this meeting, Bennett told Heede everything that was happening between her and Giovannini. Heede supported her decision to file a grievance and supported her decision to share it with Teresa Ayala and Kenneth Barr, the board of trustees' current president and vice president.

During Thanksgiving break, Bennett changed her mind. She rescinded her resignation and submitted a grievance against Giovannini Dec. 2. During an event Dec. 8, Heede told Bennett that Ayala and Barr would meet with her to help, but that didn't happen. The day after, Bennett was put on paid leave, which was thought to be recommended by the TCC Foundation board and board of trustees. However, the lawsuit said both boards didn't know about this and were told Bennett left on her own. The boards were also unaware of her rescinding her resignation.

Bennett has not yet been allowed to grab her items from her desk, the lawsuit said.

"The cesspool of events described above are the direct product of the breach of trust owed by Giovannini to the District and its employees and to the tax-paying public," the lawsuit said.



A black vulture expands its wings as it perches on top of a lamppost near SE Campus in Arlington after the snowstorm had passed Feb. 4.

### DISTRICT

### Winter storm experience more positive than last

#### JUAN SALINAS II campus editor juan.salinas465@my.tccd.edu

NW student Connor Stockman felt that this year's storm was completely underwhelming and uninteresting compared to last year's, which he compared to a storm in the apocalypse film "The Day After Tomorrow."

The storm came through Texas from Feb. 3 through Feb. 5, resulting in all TCC campuses shutting down.

"I think TCC's response was very reasonable, given that there was so much uncertainty with this storm and how deadly it was last year," NW student Zoe Gomersal said.

TCC posted that all campuses will be closed Feb. 3 at 3:41 p.m., then extended the closures to the rest of the week at 9:17 a.m. the next day.

"Our neighborhood normally experiences power outages during storms, thankfully, that did not happen this time," TR professor of kinesiology Jason Wooten said.

Wooten was in quarantine due to COVID during this year's storm. He was grateful that he and his students didn't lose power so his hybrid class could stay on schedule.

"I can guarantee the lights will stay on," Gov. Greg Abbott said during an interview with Fox 7 Austin discussing a potential winter storm Nov. 26.

TR adjunct kinesiology instructor for TCC Connect Karrie Curry was glad that express lanes were closed this year because last year's 150 car pile-up resulted in six deaths. "A lot of people complained that schools, businesses and other organizations were blowing things out of proportion by closing too early, but I was glad many people were able to stay in and safe," she said. "I loved sitting by the window watching the ice and snowfall while sipping hot cocoa with my pooches."

Curry wishes she was able to play in the snow and go sledding with her kids but couldn't due to having COVID.

TR student development associate Elizabeth Velez didn't experience last year's winter storm.

"My husband and I moved from Florida to Texas last June," she said. "This was the first time that I have lived in a state where it snowed, and my second time seeing and playing in it. My husband and I bundled up during the peak of the snowstorm to go outside and capture memories on our phones. We enjoyed the company of each other and the small memories we were able to create."

Marine Creek Collegiate High School student Julie Carrasco spent the extra time at home working on her art and playing outside in the snow with her brother. She said it was a different experience compared to last year's storm.

"Last year, I experienced multiple blackouts," she said. "Our water pipes almost bursted because of how frozen the water was, and it was freezing in our house all the time since our house isn't those fancy ones with the built-in AC or heater. We need heaters and covers to keep warm during the winter."



Joel Solis/The Collegian

A mom and son walk on Fish Creek trail in Arlington during the storm Feb. 3.

News	Entertainment	Opinion	Opinion	Editorial
<b>RISING PRICES</b>	ALBUM DON'T SELL ITSELF	CONSOLE WARS	POLITICS OVER EDUCATION	STORM DIDN'T PREVAIL
Things are getting	2 Chainz's latest	Xbox leads the	Nationwide book bans	Snow didn't punch
too expensive. <b>PG. 2</b>	album is a miss. PG. 4	decade-long battle. PG. 5	are too high. PG. 5	as hard this time. PG. 5

# THE COLLEGIAN

SERVING THE TARRANT COUNTY COLLEGE DISTRICT

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### Entertainment

**READ ALL ABOUT IT** Glimpse into the past of journalism. **PG. 4** 

### Opinion

SAFE TRAVELS TCC needs to rework its transportation methods. PG. 5

### Opinion

UNKEPT PROMISES Moderate Democrats are to blame for Joe Biden's woes. PG. 5

## Seasoning next batch of chefs



The SE culinary arts students practice making multiple dishes like poached eggs and omelettes. *Full story on Pg. 3* 

### DISTRICT

### **Transgender community opens up**

### Saddle up PG. 4



### Editorial

CANCEL THE CULTURE What does cancel culture even mean? PG. 5

### DISTRICT

### Faculty share thoughts on short-staffing

### JUAN SALINAS II campus editor

Public higher education institutions have lost 304,600 people since January, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Despite a drop in unemployment to 4.6% in the monthly job report done by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, colleges around the nation are still feeling the effects of the labor shortage.

"It's partly true that the current market environment has led to a decrease in college hiring," NE economics professor Michael Kaluya said

The current market favors the working force, Kaluya said. It causes corporations to raise their wages and provide better benefits to compete with other companies for the best employees, which colleges can't compete with.

Kaluya also said the pandemic was a factor, due to the sudden change to doing almost everything online, from admissions to courses.

Before the pandemic — there were 4.7 million higher education jobs, but now, there are only nearly 4.1 million since December 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor.

NW career services coordinator Tracy Williams said this is reflective of what is going on outside the college and what is happening in the real world.

"There are a lot of jobs available postpandemic, so there is more opportunities to choose from," Williams said. "There are also life changes that students are experiencing that make them weigh their choices in life including the job they choose."

According to the October federal jobs

### TCC students share personal stories of finding their identities

### JOSE ROMERO editor-in-chief

Allison couldn't take it anymore.

In February of last year, she had a breakdown, refusing to deny her identity, something she had been doing since her days in the Navy.

"I was in so deep denial that a couple of my very good shipmates called me out on it," she said.

Now, she's sure about her identity. She's a trans woman.

Her story is similar to others in the community at TCC, filled with ambiguity and stigma, but at peace with themselves after coming out.

Allison — a South Campus student whose last name she wants to keep private — said if she would've come out while in the Navy, she would've most likely been kicked out. She served from 2007 to 2011, leaving a year after Don't Ask, Don't Tell was repealed. DADT was a policy issued in 1993 that allowed military personnel to kick out openly gay, lesbian and bisexual people from service.

Once she fully transitioned and accepted it, it was simultaneously shattering and the easiest thing she's done.

"It's kind of funny," Allison said. "The shattering of all the illusion and self-lie, yeah, that part sucked. But, everything else was like "Oh, this is the easiest thing in the world.""

She said she was 12 years old the first time she had an idea of her identity.

"At that point in time, I was living in backwood, rural Georgia," she said. "Nobody was going to teach me or give me any kind of representative media to tell me, 'Hey, this is a normal feeling you're feeling.' The closest thing I had was 'Rocky Horror Picture Show,' and that is not good."

Allison said she has had pretty good support from her family as she transitions. She separated from her wife before they got bitter with each other. Her wife was mad at her because of how long she kept it to herself.

"When I was in denial, particularly toward the end of that time period, I was a horrible person to be around," she said. "You would not have liked me. I was cruel, callous, dismissive of everyone."

Allison is a parent with two kids, Lilith and John. She said she loves being a mom way



Alex Hoben/The Collegian

LGBTQ+ student Natalie Collins plays her guitar in the student common area at SE Campus. LGBTQ+ organizations can be found on TCC's website.

more than she did being a dad.

"It's absolutely breathtaking whenever I get to hear 'mom, mom, mom,' and John wants me to help him with something, or he wants me to play 'Minecraft' with him," she said.

NE student Jane Dubrow has been transitioning for four years. She said that people tend to have a lot of misconceptions about the transgender community.

"I feel like if people just took time to understand people's perspectives, or understand why people make certain decisions, then instead of ignorance, you might actually start to have empathy," she said.

In high school, Dubrow was an athlete. Once she came out as transgender, she had to quit.

"I've been struggling with mental health for a while, and being trans definitely doesn't help," she said.

Something LGBTQ+ Pride Club officer Grey Layden recommends that TCC should do for its transgender community is allow them to use their preferred name. Layden said some students have even reached out to the administration to get this changed but heard no response.

"It's really frustrating because it's such a simple thing," they said.

Layden said when they're put in a situation in which someone calls them by their deadname — the name a transgender person went by before they transitioned — it can be an embarrassing, uncomfortable situation.

Something that can be done to educate others on the community is safe space training because it focuses on how environments can be made more welcoming for people in the LGBTQ+ community, they said.

"Find people in the community that you can talk to," Layden said. "The best support are people who understand what you're going through."

NE Campus has the LGBTQ+ Pride Club which provides a safe space for the community. South and TR have the Power of Representation and Inclusion of Student Matters organization. The number for the Trans Lifeline is 877-565-8860. report, hourly wages have gone up by 5% from last year.

### "That is disturbing as hard as I am working for no extra pay – or appreciation."

**Anonymous** administrative assistant

"Some of it may be that students do not realize the benefits available to them with working on campus, or maybe have not even heard there are great jobs open right here at TCC where they go to school," Williams said.

Community colleges have seen a nearly 11% drop during the pandemic, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Even with the drop in enrollment among community colleges, Williams explained how career services have an abundance of student applications for workstudy jobs around TCC.

"It is more like a challenge finding the right person for the job," she said.

Williams explained it has to do with positions requiring specific qualifications and the issue of keeping the student on staff.

Kaluya has not been able to find staff for TCC's high growth student enrollment areas like dual credit and early college high schools.

"There is a lot of bureaucratic linings for some of these hirings to take shape," Kaluya said.

An administrative assistant who wished to remain anonymous due to fear of retaliation expressed her frustration with her workload. She said she is doing the duty of five admins and is near burnout and is thinking of finding a new job.

"This used to be a great job," she said. "Love the people, the students and the atmosphere. It does not pay as well as the private sector, but it has benefits that made up for the lower pay. I am hanging on right now to see if things improve."

She said she was not thrilled to hear about Chancellor Eugene Giovannini's recent raise in a board meeting a week ago.

"That is disturbing as hard as I am working for no extra pay - or appreciation," she said.