



Hayes: College football must create playoff that looks like NFL

SPORTS, 1B

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Over 490 arrested, drugs and guns seized in crime crackdown

Makenzie Boucher
Shreveport Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Over 490 arrests have been made in the Western District of Louisiana following a recent effort to fight violent crime and gangs.

U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Louisiana Zachary Keller held a press conference Monday, Feb. 9, to discuss the results of a months-long search and resource of local, state and federal law enforcement partners.

“When we work together, we maximize our impact against violent crime,”

said FBI Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Tapp.

Starting Oct. 1, 2025, the FBI and local, state partners used targeted enforcement in high crime areas to get drug dealers, violent gangs and

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Landry appoints new chief of staff

Greg Hillburn
Shreveport Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry has appointed Lafayette state Rep. Julie Emerson as his new chief of staff.

Emerson, a Republican, is serving her third term in the House, where she has been chair of the powerful Ways and Means Committee that advances state tax policy.

She replaces Kyle Ruckert, who left to chair a political organization supporting Landry's 2027 re-election bid.

“Julie Emerson is a proven leader with a deep understanding of Louisiana's people, our state Legislature, and the work that needs to be done to move Louisiana forward,” Landry said in a statement. “Her experience and commitment to conservative reform makes her the perfect person to help lead this administration as we continue fighting for a stronger, safer and more prosperous Louisiana.”

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A 2023 study found that 75% of college students feel free to report their professors if they say something objectionable. Self-identified liberal students were more likely than conservative students to report their professors to the administration. GETTY IMAGES

Student informants spur academic freedom debate

Classroom speech, rights of educators and pupils under scrutiny

Austin Sarat
Amherst College
THE CONVERSATION

Texas A&M University told philosophy professor Martin Peterson in early January that he could not teach some of Greek philosopher Plato's writings that touch on “race and gender ideology.”

The university's local chapter of the American Association of University Professors, an organization of professors and academics in the United States, quickly denounced this requirement.

Peterson, in response to his university's direction, replaced the Plato readings with material on free speech and academic freedom.

Silencing a professor from teaching a certain subject fits within what experts have long recognized as encroaching on academic freedom.

In another high-profile incident at Texas A&M in September, a student filmed an exchange with an English literature pro-

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fessor, Melissa McCoul, who was talking about gender identity.

The student said that McCoul was violating President Donald Trump's January 2025 executive order that recognized “women are biologically female, and men are biologically male.” As a result, the student told her professor, as seen in her video, “I've already been in touch with the president of A&M, and I have a meeting with him in person to show all of my documentation tomorrow.” Her video went viral.

This represents a growing threat to academic freedom: Students who act as informants and police their classes and professors for signs of political incorrectness.

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students feel free to report their professors if they say something objectionable. Self-identified liberal students were more likely than conservative students to report their professors to the administration.

As someone who teaches politically charged subjects, I am very much aware of the need to teach in inclusive ways and respect the diversity of student views. I have also written about how academic freedom is changing, given new external threats and political realities. I recognize that students will play an important role in determining the future of academic freedom.

Academic freedom is not the same as free speech

Academic freedom is a complex concept that is often confused with freedom of speech.

The American Association of University Professors offers one definition: Academic freedom is focused on ensuring that professors can say, teach, discuss and write about any issue within their field, without “interference from

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SAU Tech secures \$20M in funding

George “Clay” Mitchell
Fort Smith Southwest Times Record
USA TODAY NETWORK

Southern Arkansas University Tech has secured \$20 million in federal funding to launch a Defense Manufacturing Center of Excellence, a project officials say will significantly expand workforce training and economic growth in South Arkansas.

Chancellor Jerry Thomas announced the funding Feb. 6 during a news conference at the SAU Tech Student Center. The investment includes \$15 million for the construction of a new facility and \$5 million for advanced instructional and training equipment. The funding was approved through Fiscal Year 2026 federal appropriations with leadership from U.S. Sen. John Boozman.

“This \$20 million investment is about more than bricks and mortar,” Thomas said. “It's about creating high-wage, high-demand careers right here in South Arkansas. Our graduates will be prepared to step into \$50,000 to \$75,000 jobs, strengthen our local economy, and help our region compete at the highest level.”

The Defense Manufacturing Center of Excellence will include

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